Pink Cherry Blossom Scans
Presents:

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The Scent of Apple Blossoms

EMPLOYEE SCHEDULE
DESTINATI
BUSINESS
SHINJUK
YOU HEADING OUT, HARUNA?
I'M JUST GOING TO CHECK OUT THE INTERIOR OF THE NEW STORE. I WON'T BE GONE LONG.
PERFECT. YOU CAN STOP IN AT WAKATAKE BREWERY ON YOUR WAY BACK.
ISHIDA WAS SUPPOSED TO GO, BUT HE'S RUN INTO SOME TROUBLE.
WHAT?
WAKATAKE BREWERY? ME?
The Scent of Apple Blossoms
CAN'T HANDLE ONE LITTLE ERRAND?
Salesmen today...no initiative...
IT'S NOT THAT! IT'S JUST ...
LAST TIME I WENT, THE MASTER BREWER SCREAMED AT ME NEVER TO COME BACK.
THAT'S PAR FOR THE COURSE OVER THERE.
I GET SALT THROWN AT ME!*
*A traditional gesture to get rid of an unwanted visitor.
SIGH...YES, SIR. WHAT DO YOU WANT ME TO DO THERE?
So Haruna's our human sacrifice today, huh?
Hope you make it out alive!
Good luck!

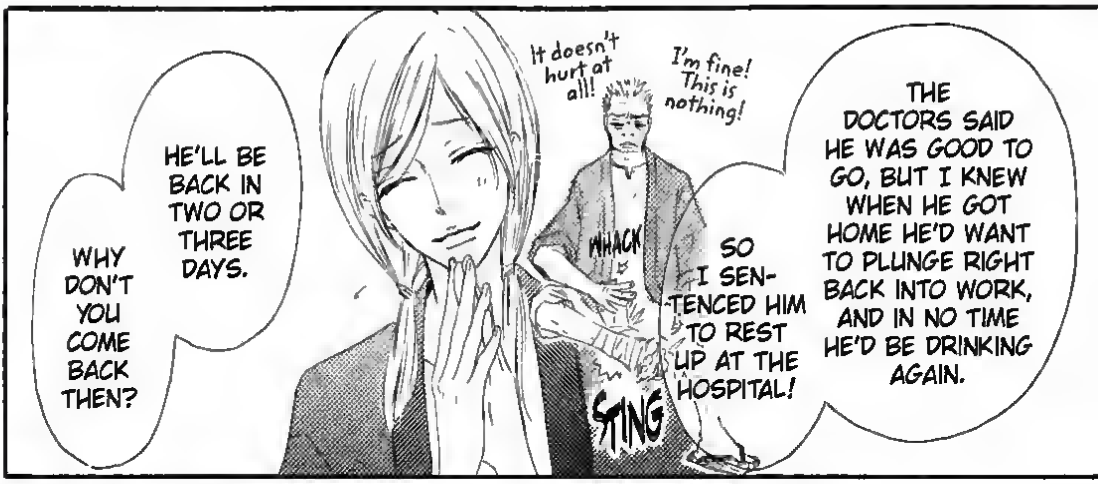
NOTHING MUCH. JUST POP IN AND INTRODUCE YOURSELF.
IF THEY NEED ANY HELP AT ALL, ROLL UP YOUR SLEEVES AND JUMP RIGHT IN. YOU GOT THAT?
YES, SIR...
AT ANY RATE, I DON'T WANT YOU TO LEAVE WAKATAKE UNTIL YOU'VE SWEET-TALKED THAT HARDHEADED BREWER...
...INTO SELLING US AT LEAST ONE BOTTLE OF THEIR SAKE!
YES, SIR...
What?!
Y-YES, SIR!
Come back in one piece, Haruna.
AND WHATEVER YOU DO, DON'T GET ON HIS BAD SIDE.
The infamous Wakatake Brewery is a small family-owned sake distillery.
AWW...
The master brewer may be a crank, but the sake he makes is said to be out of this world, particularly his hard-to-get ginjoshu.
Our company wants to stock it in our restaurants and stores, but he keeps stubbornly refusing.
So every day one of us has to visit Wakatake, where the brewer screams and throws stuff until we run for it.
I guess today's my turn to suffer.
THIS SUCKS!
I'M SCARED.
Oh, the tragic life of a business-man...

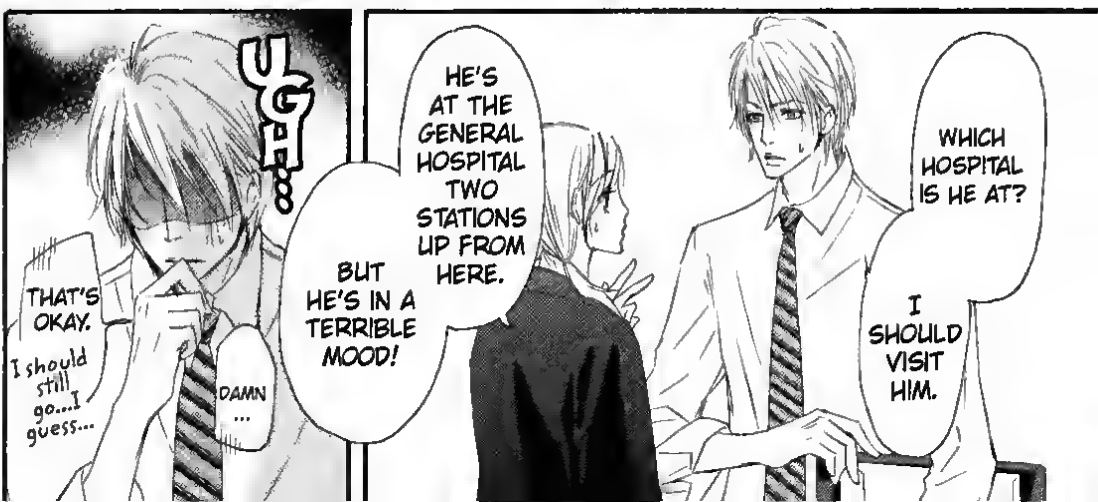
Can't we just order our sake elsewhere? And why won't he sell to us in the first place?
I don't drink, so it's hard for me to understand what the big deal is.
I wonder who that is. Someone from the brewery?
I've never seen him before, but...
The Scent of Apple Blossoms
...he's really hot.

He's just my type! ♡
YEAH?
UM... ER...
Uh-oh... this could be trouble!
DO YOU WORK AT WAKATAKE BREWERY?
I'M FROM WEF...
ERK
Huh?
What?
UH, ARE YOU OKAY?
For a second there he really looked pissed...
Huh?
uh...
YES?
HEY, HARUNA!
YOU NEED TO TALK TO THE PERSON INSIDE.
NO.
I'M JUST THE PART-TIME HELP.

TSK
WHAT?
I... UM...
MY NAME'S HARUNA, SO I ASSUMED...
Wait, I never introduced myself.
HEY! YOU'VE GOT A CUSTOMER!
YOU IN THERE, HARUNA?
What's his problem?!
He clicked his tongue at me!
MUTSUKI HARUNA FROM W&F.
WOW! YOUR LAST NAME IS THE SAME AS MY FIRST!
NICE TO MEET YOU. I'M THE BREWERY MANAGER, HARUNA NAKAGAWA.
LET'S SEE...W&F... YOU'RE THE COMPANY THAT HARASSES MY GRANDPA EVERY DAY, RIGHT?
UH...
I'M SO SORRY.
I'M AFRAID I'M HERE FOR ANOTHER SCOLDING.
SO IS THE MASTER BREWER ...?
HA HA! YOU'RE A RELENTLESS ONE!
BUT I'M SORRY TO TELL YOU...

LAST NIGHT HE GOT DRUNK, TOOK A NASTY SPILL AND FRACTURED HIS LEG.
OH, HE'S NOT SICK OR ANYTHING LIKE THAT.
UM...IS HE ALL RIGHT?
I SEE...
HE'S IN THE HOSPITAL?!


WHY DON'T YOU COME BACK THEN?
HE'LL BE BACK IN TWO OR THREE DAYS.
It doesn't hurt at all!
I'm fine! This is nothing!
WHACK
STING
SO I SENTENCED HIM TO REST UP AT THE HOSPITAL!
THE DOCTORS SAID HE WAS GOOD TO GO, BUT I KNEW WHEN HE GOT HOME HE'D WANT TO PLUNGE RIGHT BACK INTO WORK, AND IN NO TIME HE'D BE DRINKING AGAIN.


UGH...
THAT'S OKAY.
I should still go...I guess...
DAMN...
BUT HE'S IN A TERRIBLE MOOD!
HE'S AT THE GENERAL HOSPITAL TWO STATIONS UP FROM HERE.
WHICH HOSPITAL IS HE AT?
I SHOULD VISIT HIM.

WAKATA
WELL, GOOD LUCK! DO YOU NEED DIRECTIONS? THE NEIGHBORHOOD'S A LITTLE CONFUSING.
WAIT A MINUTE AND I'LL DRAW YOU A MAP.
THANKS. SORRY TO TROUBLE YOU.
NOT AT ALL!
...
UM...
...WHO WAS THAT GUY OUTSIDE?
HMM? OUTSIDE?
OH, THAT'S MY BIG BROTHER.
NOT VERY FRIENDLY, IS HE?
HA HA...
IS YOUR BROTHER A BREWER AS WELL?
NO, HE'S IN A DIFFERENT LINE OF WORK. SOMETHING TO DO WITH COMPUTERS.
HIS JOB IS PRETTY FLEXIBLE, SO HE'S HELPING OUT UNTIL GRANDPA GETS BACK.
SOMEONE NEEDS TO MAN THE COUNTER AND MAKE DELIVERIES. THERE'S NO WAY I COULD DO IT ALL BY MYSELF.
Do you believe in love at first sight?

I've yet to have a relationship that worked out in the long run.
I have a bad habit of falling for straight guys.
The only thing is... well...my instincts don't always pan out.
I do. The moment you lock eyes, you feel the electricity race through your body.

But that's love. You can't tell a heart what to feel...
THAT GUY SEEMS LIKE A TOUGH NUT TO CRACK.
BUT I REALLY WANNA SEE HIM AGAIN...
Maybe I'll volunteer for the next Wakatake visit.
...even if it's your own.

WAKA-TAKE...
APPARENTLY THE MASTER BREWER AT WAKATAKE IS BACK AT WORK TODAY.
HE RUSHED OUT OF HERE EARLIER.
I need him to sign this...
HUH? WHERE'S THE MANA-GER? IS HE OUT?

SO THE OLD BREWER'S OUT OF THE HOSPITAL.
MAYBE I'LL GO NEXT TIME.
THE MASTER BREWER SCARES ME, BUT I MIGHT SEE THAT HOT GUY AGAIN...
NAKAGAWA-SAN, COULD YOU TAKE A LOOK AT THIS COMPUTER?
IT'S BEEN ON THE FRITZ LATELY...
HMM...DID YOU INSTALL ANY NEW SOFTWARE RECENTLY? MAYBE SOME SORT OF FREEWARE?
OH, I THINK I DID! I WANTED TO SPEED UP MY PHOTO EDITING.
Hey!
That profile...
It's the guy from Wakatake!
May I open it?
I think it was this file.
HEY, WHO'S THAT?
THE GUY TALKING TO ONO-SAN! THE ONE ON THE COMPUTER...
HUH?
OH, THAT'S THE SYSTEMS ENGINEER WE SUB-CONTRACTED.
But I'd like to keep the software...
Hmm... I'll see if I can manage that.
WHAT ABOUT HIM?
HE STOPS BY FROM TIME TO TIME TO DO MAINTENANCE.
NEVER MIND.
It almost seems...
Come to think of it, Haruna said he worked with computers...

...like fate.

THANKS FOR ALL YOUR HARD WORK TODAY.
Enjoy!
Co

WHAT-EVER.
Co

WANT SOME COFFEE?
"NOT VERY FRIENDLY" IS PUTTING IT MILDLY.

...
HMPH
...

I DIDN'T KNOW YOU WERE OUR SYSTEMS ENGINEER.
I'M OUT OF THE OFFICE A LOT, SO I GUESS WE'VE JUST NEVER RUN INTO EACH OTHER, HUH?
GUESS NOT.
NAH, I'M...
NOW, DON'T BE LIKE THAT. I ALREADY BOUGHT IT, SO YOU MIGHT AS WELL ENJOY IT.
...THANKS
Coffee
GOOD FOR HIM.
...
MY MANAGER JUST WENT TO PAY HIM A VISIT...
SO I HEARD THE MASTER BREWER GOT OUT OF THE HOSPITAL.
CLICK
CLICK CLICK
GLANCE
IT'S LIKE TALKING TO A WALL!
THIS IS GOING NO-WHERE!
UM...
I haven't felt this excited in *forever!*
Well, it can't hurt to give it a shot, right?
I can't take it! He's just... so...*hot!*

DO YOU HAVE A GIRLFRIEND, NAKAGAWA-SAN?
...
Crap! That did *not* go over well!
I could really get used to those intense eyes, though...
I BET YOU'RE A REAL CATCH.
MAYBE YOU'RE ALREADY MARRIED...
Thank you, masochistic streak!
NOPE.
LUCKY ME!
NO WIFE, NO GIRL-FRIEND.
THAT'S A SURPRISE. I MEAN, A GOOD-LOOKING GUY LIKE YOU...
OR NOT. HE'S NOT MAKING THIS EASY.
...
SO... WHAT'S YOUR TYPE?
SORRY ...

...BUT WHY ARE YOU ASKING ME ALL THIS?
HOW IS IT ANY OF YOUR BUSINESS?
I'M NOT INTERESTED IN SITTING AROUND MAKING CHIT-CHAT.
...
Man, talk about *harsh*.
But even after that...
...I can't take my eyes off him.
I want ...
...this man.
MAYBE IT *IS* MY BUSINESS.
I shouldn't do this. Alarm bells are going off in my head.
But if I could stay rational around this guy...
YOU SEE...

....I never would've been attracted to him in the first place.
...I FELL FOR YOU THE MOMENT WE MET.
Oh boy...
...
KRIK
UH...
...
THAT KINDA JUST POPPED OUT...
...BUT I WASN'T KIDDING... I MEAN, I...
SORRY.

...
THANKS FOR THE COFFEE.
FALL ALL YOU LIKE, BUT I'M NOT INTERESTED IN THAT KIND OF THING.
TRY SOMEONE ELSE.
WSSH
It sounds like he's not interested in a relation-ship...
...but he didn't seem bothered that I'm a guy.
Or maybe I'm just hearing what I want to hear.
Alone and crying into my ice-cold coffee...
Yeah, that's *exactly* what I'm doing. Again.

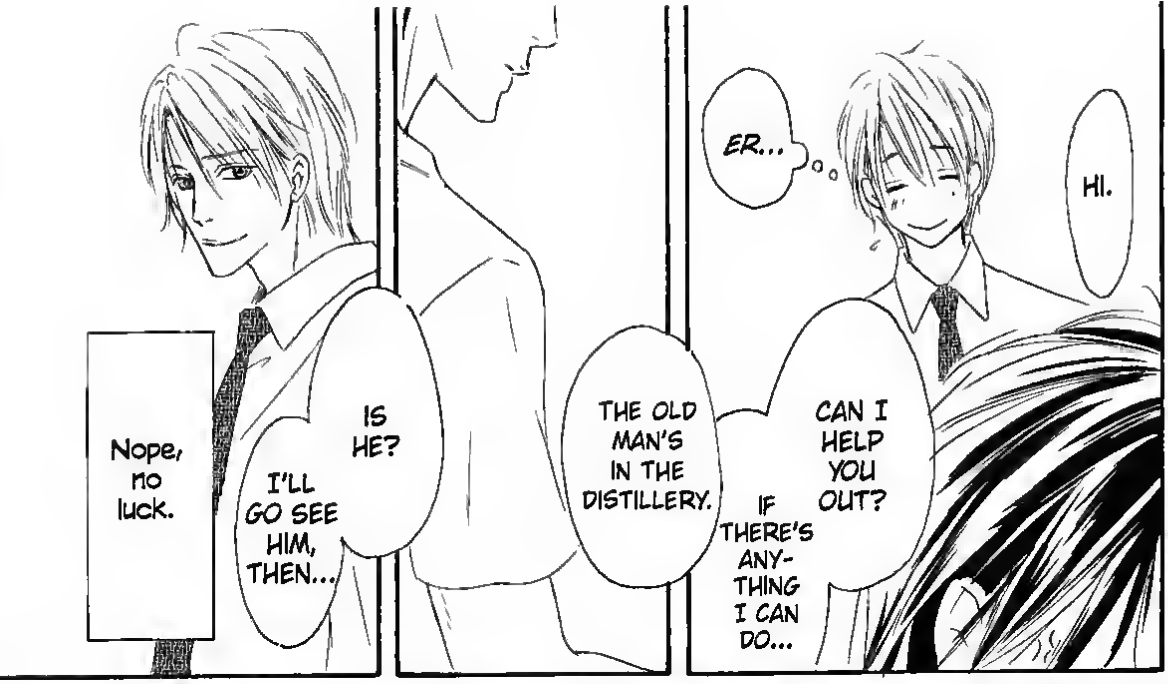
I may be a glutton for punishment, but at least I know how to bounce back!
GOOD AFTERNOON! HARUNA FROM W&F HERE!
...
THANKS FOR TALKING TO ME THE OTHER DAY.
TAKING A BREAK FROM YOUR COMPUTER WORK?
YUP.
HARUNA, YOU'VE GOT A CUSTOM-ER.
HE'S JUST AS HOT AS EVER...
GOOD MORN-
IT'S THE OTHER HARUNA!
OH, HI!
OH NO! HE'S LEAV-ING!
I'M SORRY MY COMPANY BUGS YOU SO OFTEN, BUT IS THE BREWER HERE?
MY GRANDPA'S IN THE WARE-HOUSE.
SHALL WE?
GREAT.

HOW MANY TIMES DO I HAVE TO SAY IT? I'M NOT SELLING MY SAKE TO A PACK OF FOOLS FROM THE BACK-END OF NOWHERE!
YOU NEVER LEARN, DO YOU? WHERE DO YOU PEOPLE GET OFF?
WAKATAKA BREWERY
HE'S TAKEN THE TROUBLE TO COME ALL THIS WAY. WHY DON'T YOU JUST GIVE HIM A LITTLE-
YOU STAY OUT OF THIS, GIRL!!!
Whoa!
!
GET OUT!!
NO SCRAP OF PAPER IS GOING TO HELP YOU GET YOUR PAWS ON MY SAKE!
COME ON, GRANDPA! THERE'S NO NEED FOR YOU TO YELL AT THE POOR GUY.
PLEASE RETHINK YOUR DECISION, SIR.
IF YOU'D JUST TAKE A LOOK AT THIS PROPO-SAL...
Yeesh, he's creepy!
GET OUT OF HERE.
WE'VE GOT NOTHING TO TALK ABOUT.
IF YOU'D LISTEN TO WHAT I HAVE TO SAY...
PLEASE, SIR!

PLEASE, SIR, I'M BEGGING YOU...
ERK
...
ARE YOU DEAF, BOY? I SAID GET OUT!
THWACK!
AHH!
He threw a giant ladle at me!
I deserve hazard pay!
ARGH...

HA!
NO ONE WANTS TO GO!
BUT I THOUGHT YOU VOLUNTEERED TO DO IT.
YEAH, I DID, BUT...PUT YOURSELF IN MY SHOES! EVERY TIME I SHOW UP, HE HURLS STUFF AT ME!
Here's the data we talked about.
WHAT'S UP, HARUNA? YOU LOOK EXHAUSTED.
NOT GOING TO WAKATAKE TODAY?
I'M SUPPOSED TO GO NOW.
I REALLY DON'T WANT TO!
GLOOOM
WHIR
Ahhh!
WHIR
AND YESTERDAY HE THREW HIS CRUTCHES AT ME!
Ahh! Grandpa!
WHIR
SERIOUSLY? HE'S NOT KIDDING AROUND!
Ha ha ha!
Get going!
Aieee!
Get out!
HUH? WHAT THE HECK DOES HE THROW AT YOU?
WHOOSH
HA HA!
OH, JUST LADLES...OR BARRELS...
Grandpa, really!
TUP
HELLO!
...
HELLO
Haruna! Customer!
That's what really bums me out...
VOOM
AND HE'S JUST AS COLD AS EVER...
Sigh...
THIS MAY BE A LOST CAUSE.
IT'S NOT FUNNY!
YOU WOULDN'T BELIEVE HOW MEAN THAT STUBBORN OLD GOAT IS.

ARGH...
YOU OKAY?
WANT ME TO GO TODAY?
Oh, well. It's not like I ever really had a chance with him.
THANKS, BUT I'LL TRY AND HANG IN THERE A LITTLE LONGER.
I'D BETTER GET GOING!
But I'm aching to see something other than his profile as he turns away from me.
THAT'S IT! ONCE MORE INTO THE BREACH!
If you can get Wakafake, you'll be the office hero.
I want him to look me in the eye, even it's to glare at me.
HELLO!
HARUNA FROM W&F HERE!
...
If he doesn't look at me today...
...I'll give up on him.


Hi.
ER...
CAN I HELP YOU OUT?
IF THERE'S ANY-THING I CAN DO...
THE OLD MAN'S IN THE DISTILLERY.
IS HE?
I'LL GO SEE HIM, THEN...
Nope, no luck.

He won't even give me a chance to talk.
My last memory will be of his back.
Aww ...

HEY THERE, MUCCHAN!
YOU'RE LATE TODAY!

YUP, THAT'S GOOD.
HELLO!
HARUNA FROM W&F HERE!
WE COULD PROBABLY LEAVE IT FOR ANOTHER COUPLE OF YEARS, THOUGH...
WHAT? WON'T THAT MAKE IT TOO STRONG?

Guess I'd better go do my duty.

GOOD AFTER-NOON, SIR.
WHAT'RE YOU UP TO TODAY?
WE WERE JUST TASTING THE AGED SAKE.
OH?
WE DON'T SELL THIS SAKE. WE ONLY GIVE IT AS A GIFT TO OUR REGULAR CUSTOMERS.
WOULD YOU LIKE TO TRY IT?
OH NO, I...
I'M WORK-ING.
AW... JUST A SIP WON'T HURT! IT'S DELICIOUS!
I'M SURE, BUT...
TWO OOM
YOU LITTLE PUNK!
You don't deserve such kindness!
THINK YOU'RE TOO GOOD FOR MY SAKE?
NO, NO, IT'S NOT THAT!
IT'S JUST... I'M ON COMPANY TIME...
SHOOP
...AND YOU WON'T EVEN DRINK MY SAKE?
YOU COME HERE TO PESTER US EVERY SINGLE DAY...
ER...
...to tell him I don't drink!
This is clearly not the time...
BOOM

HEY, GRAMPS, SAKAMOTOYA IS ON THE PHONE...
AND YOU HAVE THE GALL TO ASK ME TO SELL TO YOU?
SPLASH
AHH!!
What a waste.
The aged sake?
HEY, WHAT THE HELL?
YOU GOT ME TOO!
UGH! NOT SAKE!
IT GOT IN MY MOUTH!
PFFFT
Oh, Mucchan, no...
GRRR
YOU LITTLE PRICK...
IS MY SAKE SO DISGUSTING THAT YOU'RE SPITTING IT OUT?
GRP
VOOOM
GET OUT!!
AND DON'T YOU EVER COME BACK!!!
LEAVE ME OUTTA THIS!
AHHHH!
What now?

RUB
RUB
RUB
I GOT SALT IN MY EYES!
OW! IT REALLY STINGS!
GRAMPS, JUST COOL IT...
FWMP
UGH!
OUCH!
IT HURTS!!
FWMP
FWMP
WHAT IS THIS, SALT?
GTP
YOU DUMB-ASS.
OWWW ...
GTT
JUST CALM DOWN.
C'MERE. YOU NEED TO WASH IT OUT.
Whoa.
CSSH
!
DON'T RUB IT IN. YOU'LL JUST MAKE IT WORSE.
BUT IT HURTS...
Stop rubbing! Jeez, just keep walking!
Grrr...
Mucchan...
It hurts... It hurts...
ZSSSH
But my eyes are stinging so badly I can't get a good look...
Oh, cruel fate!
Wow, what a view!
He's so close!

DAMMIT, THERE'S EVEN SALT IN MY CLOTHES...
...
NO, IT'S NOT THAT BAD.
SHAA
IF IT STILL HURTS, I CAN TAKE YOU TO THE HOSPITAL.
Y-YEAH... I'VE STILL GOT SOME SALT IN MY EYES...
...BUT I'M FINE.
YOU OKAY?
WOOSH
BUT SERIOUSLY, CAN YOU STOP ANTAGONIZING THE OLD MAN?
HIS BLOOD PRES-SURE'S HIGH ENOUGH AS IT IS...
SHOOF
I WAS JUST AN INNOCENT BY-STANDER ...
KRMBL KRMBL
Talk about a silver lining!
WHOA!
Just minutes ago, this would've been unthink-able.
It's strange. We're finally having a regular conver-sation, and he's really nice.

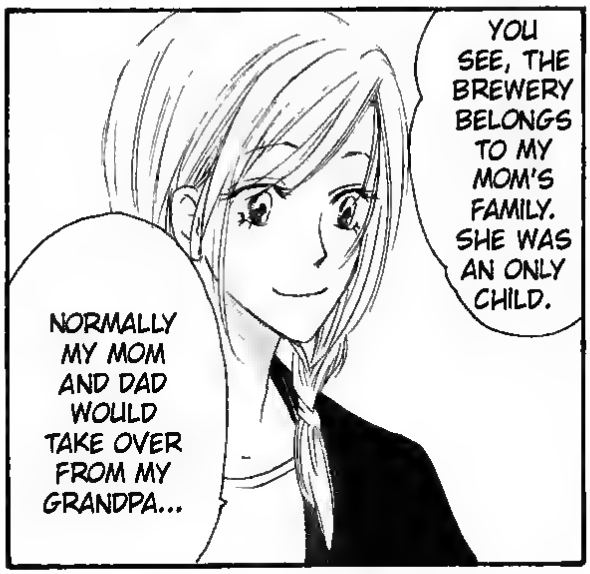
MAY I TOUCH IT?
I TOLD YOU BEFORE ...
...I'M NOT INTERESTED IN THAT KIND OF THING.
WHERE'D YOU GET THIS SCAR?
SOME KIND OF SURGERY?
...NO.
IT'S FROM WHEN I WAS KID...

PITTER PATTER
MUC-CHAN! I BROUGHT SOME TOWELS!
PITTER PATTER
I'M OKAY NOW.
ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?
YOU SURE?
HOW'RE YOUR EYES?
ARE YOU FOR REAL?
I...
I KNOW.
BUT... THAT'S OKAY.
HERE'S A TOWEL FOR YOU TOO.
HEY, DON'T STRIP HERE!
MUCCHAN, I'M RUNNING A BATH FOR YOU, OKAY?
BOTH OF YOU SHOULD TAKE ONE.
HUH?
Hey, things are...
...
YOU CAN'T GO BACK TO WORK LIKE THAT. I'LL TAKE YOUR SUIT TO THE CLEANERS.
YOU CAN BORROW A CHANGE OF CLOTHES FROM MY BROTHER.
...kind of...

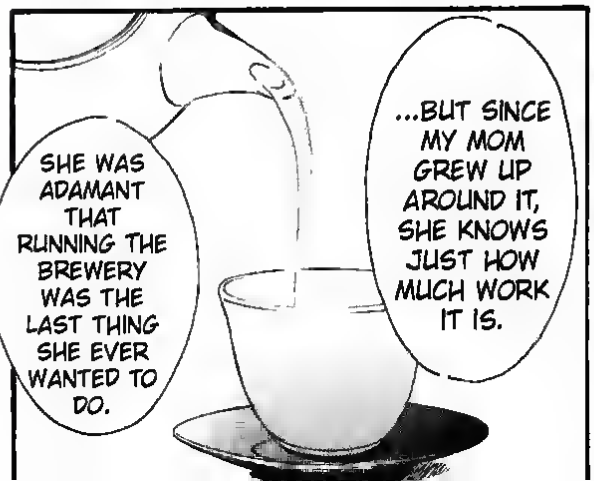
...going my way!
Sorry for all the trouble I've caused.
I'm fine!
Are you okay? Your eyes are all red.
JUST THE OTHER DAY, HE LOOKED SO DOWN.
HE SURE KNOWS HOW TO RALLY!
I envy him...
SORT OF. WELL... LATER!
Heh...
I HEARD YOU GOT INTO TROUBLE THERE LAST WEEK.
OH, HARUNA. VISITING WAKATAKE AGAIN?
WELL, I'M OFF!
SINES TRIP
SKCH
SKCH
STORE
↓
WAKATAKE
HOME
HE SHOULD BE BACK THIS EVENING.
I SEE...
I'M SORRY, MUCCHAN.
GRANDPA'S AT A NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION MEETING.

DON'T TELL ME HE'S AT MY OFFICE!
HMM? NO, HE'S AT HIS REGULAR JOB.
DID YOU NEED HIM FOR SOME-THING?
HE SAID HE'D COME BACK IF HE FINISHED UP EARLY, THOUGH.
...IS YOUR BROTHER HERE TODAY?
I'LL COME BACK THEN.
OH, BY THE WAY...
CLICK
OH, YEAH! MUCCHAN?
I'LL SEE YOU LATER, THEN.
WHAT A LET-DOWN.
ER... OKAY, THANKS.
NO...I JUST WANTED TO RETURN THE CLOTHES I BORROWED THE OTHER DAY.
OH, I CAN TAKE THOSE FOR YOU!
DO YOU LIKE MANJU SWEETS?

!
WOW, HARUNA-CHAN! THEY'RE DELI-CIOUS!
HEH HEH... THANKS!
BON APPÉTIT!
SURE DID! THEY'RE MY GRANDMA'S RECIPE. EAT UP!
OOH, THEY'RE PIPING HOT!
DID YOU MAKE THESE, HARUNA-CHAN?


YOU SEE, THE BREWERY BELONGS TO MY MOM'S FAMILY. SHE WAS AN ONLY CHILD.
NORMALLY MY MOM AND DAD WOULD TAKE OVER FROM MY GRANDPA...

TELL ME, HARUNA-CHAN...
...WHY DO YOU WANT TO TAKE OVER THE BREWERY? ISN'T IT A TOUGH JOB?
WHY YOU AND NOT YOUR BROTHER?


...BUT SINCE MY MOM GREW UP AROUND IT, SHE KNOWS JUST HOW MUCH WORK IT IS.
SHE WAS ADAMANT THAT RUNNING THE BREWERY WAS THE LAST THING SHE EVER WANTED TO DO.

MY GRANDPA LOVED MY MOM ENOUGH TO RESPECT HER FEELINGS, SO HE DECLARED HE WOULD CLOSE THE BREWERY WHEN HE RETIRED.
EVEN THOUGH I WAS JUST A KID, THAT SEEMED SO SAD TO ME.
MY BROTHER AND I USED TO PLAY HERE ALL THE TIME...
...AND I LOVED WATCHING THE BREWERS PUTTING ALL THEIR PASSION INTO MAKING SAKE.
I'D ALWAYS THOUGHT THAT WHEN I GREW UP, I'D BE THERE MAKING SAKE WITH THEM.
SO I DECIDED ...
...WHY NOT TAKE OVER THE BREWERY MYSELF?
WE'VE HAD SOME UPS AND DOWNS, BUT WE'RE ALL STILL HERE!
DIDN'T YOUR MOTHER OBJECT?
She cried and begged!
SHE SURE DID!
BUT I'M JUST AS STUBBORN AS MY GRANDPA, SO I GOT WHAT I WANTED IN THE END.

MY BROTHER THOUGHT ABOUT TAKING IT OVER HIMSELF.
I THINK HE FELT THE SAME WAY I DID.
OH YEAH?
BUT MOM WOULD NEVER ALLOW IT.
HE WAS ALWAYS THE SMART ONE, AND MOM INSISTED THAT HE BE A GOOD SON, GO TO COLLEGE AND MAKE SOMETHING OF HIMSELF.
BECAUSE HE OBEYED HER WISHES...
...SHE RELENTED AND LET ME TAKE OVER THE BREWERY.
WITHOUT MY BROTHER, I'D PROBABLY BE WORKING IN AN OFFICE SOMEWHERE...
HA HA
I SEE.
I GUESS IT'S NOT EASY DEALING WITH A FAMILY BUSINESS.
NO, IT'S NOT.
BUT IT'S A LOT OF FUN! COME WATCH THE BREWING THIS AUTUMN!
I'D LOVE TO!
HEY, HARUNA!
WHAT'S THIS CRAP DOING OUT HERE? ARE YOU GONNA PUT IT IN THE SHOP?
EEK! IT'S MY BROTHER!
OKAY, OKAY! SHEESH! DON'T TOUCH IT!
BDMD

JEEZ...
YOU'RE SO LOUD...
DON'T YELL AT ME! YOU'RE THE ONE WHO LEFT IT OUT!
SORRY!
WANT SOME MANJU?
SURE.
PITTER PATTER
SITTING
Hi. I just stopped by.
PRETTY
WHAAAT?
...
WHAT ARE YOU...
...DOING HERE?
EATING HARUNA-CHAN'S MANJU.
THEY'RE REALLY TASTY.
I ALSO BROUGHT YOUR CLOTHES.

CRIK
IF YOU DON'T NEED ME FOR ANYTHING, I'M GOING HOME.
DO...
UM...
HARUNA, I CHANGED MY MIND. I DON'T WANT ANY MANJU!
YOU SURE HAVE A LOT OF FREE TIME.
...HATE ME THAT MUCH?
DO YOU REALLY...
HUH?

I DON'T CARE THAT YOU'RE A MAN.
AND I DON'T HATE YOU EITHER.
THIS IS JUST THE WAY I AM.
I KNOW IT WAS UNCOM-FORTABLE TO HAVE A MAN COME ON TO YOU...
...BUT YOU DON'T NEED TO MAKE YOUR DISGUST THAT OBVIOUS!
SHF SHF
...
GRP
I DON'T LIKE TO GET TANGLED UP IN TROUBLE.
JUST GIVE UP, ALREADY. THIS ISN'T THE PLACE FOR-
NO.
HUH?
HEY!
I WON'T.
IF THAT'S ALL IT IS, IT'S NOT ENOUGH...
...TO MAKE ME GIVE UP!
I'M IN LOVE WITH YOU!
I FELL IN LOVE THE MOMENT I MET YOU!

I... DON'T THINK YOU SHOULD RUN AWAY FROM THIS...
...JUST BECAUSE IT MIGHT CAUSE TROUBLE ...
What's happening to me?
I...
...REALLY ...
...feel... weird...
SHOOF
HEY.
OOH...
Whoa! Suddenly he's so close!
He really is hot... My heart's racing...
I feel... huh?
Every-thing's... going... dark...

BLINK
THROB
WHAT THE...?
MY HEAD IS KILLING ME!
?!!
...?
...
UP!
...?

OWWW...
YOU AWAKE NOW, YOU BIG LUSH?
HUH?
POUND POUND
DRUNK? BUT I DIDN'T HAVE ANY ALCOHOL...
HOW'RE YOU FEELING?
BRR
BRR
I...
I'VE GOT A SPLITTING HEAD-ACHE!
WHY?
SAKA-MANJU?
SURE YOU DID. YOU ATE THOSE SAKA-MANJU.
THEY'RE MANJU MADE WITH SAKE LEES...THE SEDIMENTS LEFT OVER FROM SAKE-MAKING.
NO WAY...
WHY DO YOU THINK? YOU PASSED OUT DRUNK.

UGH...
SNEAKING SAKE INTO SWEETS... THAT'S NOT FAIR...
THAT'S THE FIRST TIME I EVER SAW ANYONE GET STINKING DRUNK ON SAKAMANJU. IT'S NOT LIKE SAKE LEES CONTAIN MUCH ALCOHOL.
WHAT?!?!
WHO THE HELL PUTS SAKE IN DESSERTS?
IT'S JUST A TYPE OF MANJU FILLING!
What do you EXPECT at a brewery?
IT'S MY JOB...
...
REALLY? THEN WHY ARE YOU HERE TRYING TO BUY OUR SAKE?
I CAN'T HANDLE ANY AMOUNT OF BOOZE.
IT'S A CONGENITAL THING.
BLECH
OOOH...
OOOOH...
BAM
OH NO! MY JOB! WORK!
I WAS SUPPOSED TO VISIT OUR VENDORS TODAY!
...

LIE STILL, YOU IDIOT.
GRP
BUT I HAVE TO GET TO WORK...
IT'S ALL RIGHT. HARUNA CALLED YOUR OFFICE AND TOLD THEM YOU WEREN'T FEELING WELL.
THEY SAID YOU COULD GO HOME FOR THE DAY.
R-REALLY?
YEAH. JUST GET SOME MORE SLEEP.
WHEW
OKAY ...

UM, WHEN I WAS DRUNK ...
...DID I SAY ANY-THING WEIRD?
YOU DON'T REMEMBER? SUCKS TO BE YOU.
C'MON, WHAT DID I SAY? NEVER MIND...I CAN PROBABLY GUESS.
IT DOESN'T MATTER. JUST SLEEP.
YOU'RE WHITE AS A SHEET. AND SHIVERING ...
PAT
OKAY...

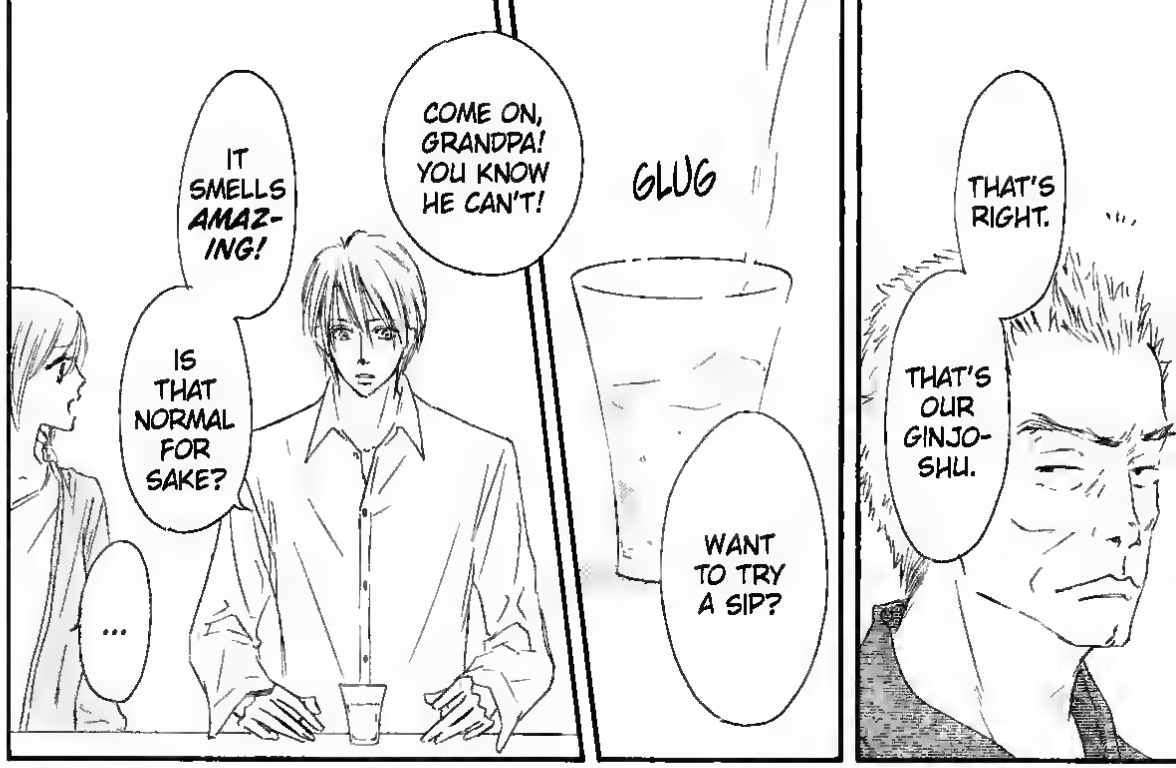
His hand's so warm.
It feels good...
EVEN IF YOU'RE NOT HUNGRY, YOU NEED TO GET SOMETHING IN YOUR STOMACH.
It's good!
How in the world ...
YES, MA'AM!
HERE, MUCCHAN. DON'T STAND ON CEREMONY. EAT UP!
...
...
I'M SORRY!
I DIDN'T MEAN TO STAY FOR DINNER!
...did I get myself into this?
When I woke up, dinner was ready.
UM... I... ER...
...

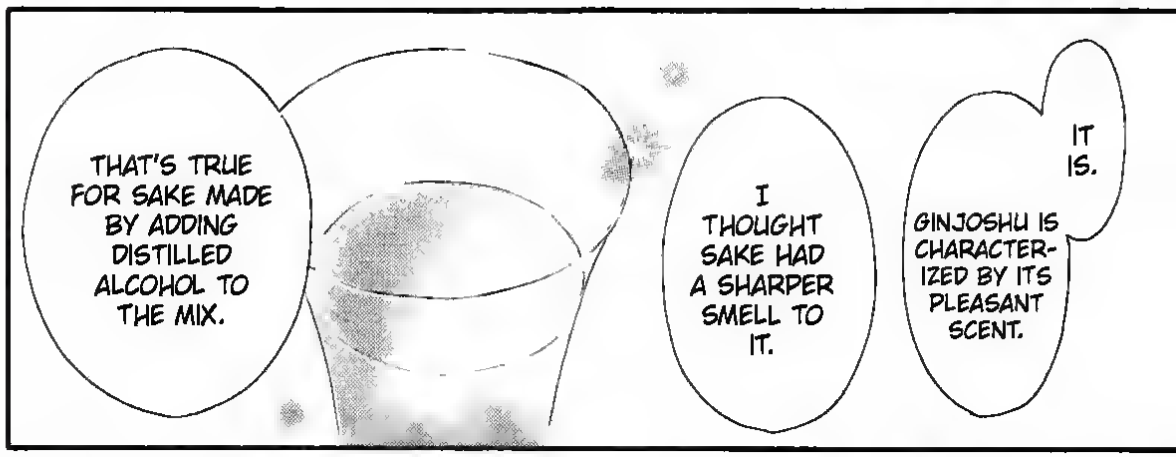
STOP IT, GRANDPA.
MUCCHAN GOT DRUNK ON SAKAMANJU. THERE'S NO WAY HE CAN HANDLE THE REAL THING.
STAB
SAD...
...BUT TRUE.
WHAAAT?!
...
THUNK
WANT A DRINK?
IS HE TRYING TO KILL ME?
HUH?
POP
WELL ...
SORRY.
GRAND-PA!
HRMPH ...
...
NOW WILL YOU APOLO-GIZE?
...
COME ON, GRANDPA. BE STRAIGHT WITH HIM.
YOU KNOW, MUCCHAN, GRANDPA PUT YOU THROUGH ALL THAT TROUBLE, THROWING SAKE AND SALT ON YOU.
HE WON'T ADMIT IT, BUT HE FEELS TERRIBLE. HE'S TRYING TO APOLOGIZE.
YOU DON'T GOTTA YAP ON ABOUT IT!
...

NO, I'M THE ONE WHO'S GOTTA-I MEAN, I SHOULD APOLOGIZE. I SHOULD'VE JUST TOLD YOU I CAN'T DRINK ALCOHOL.
I THOUGHT YOU'D BE APPALLED THAT SOMEONE WHO DOESN'T EVEN DRINK WAS COMING TO TALK TO YOU ABOUT YOUR SAKE.
I'M SORRY ...
I KNOW SOME PEOPLE CAN'T HANDLE ALCOHOL, BUT I NEVER DREAMED IT COULD BE AS SEVERE AS THAT!
Ha ha ha...
APPARENTLY MY FAMILY'S BEEN LIKE THIS FOR GENERATIONS.
IT'S GENETIC.
My family's been DRINKING for generations...
I SEE. THE WHOLE FAMILY, HUH?
WHAT'S YOUR BACKGROUND, MUC-CHAN?
MY BACKGROUND?
SURE.
WHERE WERE YOU BORN? ARE YOU FROM TOKYO?
NO, I WAS BORN IN L.A.
...
ELLAY?
WHERE'S THAT?
IS THAT AN ISLAND OR SOMETHING?
NO, UH...
LOS ANGELES, IN THE U.S.
WHAT?!
I'M AFRAID I'M JAPANESE-AMERICAN.
Ha ha...
El Ay? Elle? Yay?

You were born in Los Angeles? How cool!
THAT'S NOTHING TO APOLOGIZE FOR!
NOW THAT YOU MENTION IT, THAT MAKES SENSE!
TO BE HONEST, YOU'RE A LITTLE DIFFERENT FROM THE OTHER SALESMEN.
HA HA...
BECAUSE I'M REALLY RUDE AND TERRIBLE AT READING SOCIAL CUES?
NO, NO, THAT'S NOT WHAT I MEANT!
YOU'RE NOT SO STIFF, AND YOU'RE A LOT MORE APPROACH-ABLE.
I LIKE YOU, MUCCHAN! OUT OF ALL THE SALESMEN WHO COME TO THE BREWERY, YOU'RE THE CUTEST!
And I'M terrible at reading social cues too.
Is Haruna into this guy?
BUT WHEN I FIRST CAME BACK TO JAPAN...
...THIS WAS BACK IN MIDDLE SCHOOL...
I DON'T KNOW...I GUESS BECAUSE I GREW UP IN A PLACE WHERE PEOPLE ARE A LITTLE TOO FRANK...
...WHERE EVERY-ONE'S VERY ASSERTIVE ...
HEH... THANKS.
PERSONALLY, I'D SAY MY ONLY REDEEMING QUALITY IS THAT I'M NOT SHY.
CLINK

...I HAD A PRETTY HARD TIME FITTING IN AT SCHOOL.
I'M ACTUALLY A LOT BETTER WITH PEOPLE THAN I WAS BACK THEN.
What a jerk.
Who the heck does he think he is?
BUT THERE ARE STILL TIMES WHEN I CAN'T STAY QUIET...
...AND I SAY THINGS I SHOULDN'T....
...AND END UP CAUSING TROUBLE.
WELL, AS LONG AS YOU DON'T SAY ANYTHING HURTFUL, WHAT'S WRONG WITH THAT?
RIGHT?
Why are you asking ME?
...
IT'S BETTER TO SAY SOMETHING STRAIGHT OUT THAN LET IT FESTER INSIDE, RIGHT?
EEK...
OH...I DON'T KNOW...
...
C'MON, YOU KNOW IT'S TRUE.
WAFT
THAT SMELLS ...
...SO GOOD.
IS THAT THE SAKE?


IT SMELLS AMAZ-ING!
COME ON, GRANDPA! YOU KNOW HE CAN'T!
GLUG
THAT'S RIGHT.
IS THAT NORMAL FOR SAKE?
THAT'S OUR GINJO-SHU.
...
WANT TO TRY A SIP?


THAT'S TRUE FOR SAKE MADE BY ADDING DISTILLED ALCOHOL TO THE MIX.
I THOUGHT SAKE HAD A SHARPER SMELL TO IT.
IT IS. GINJOSHU IS CHARACTER-IZED BY ITS PLEASANT SCENT.

...
IT REALLY SMELLS DELICIOUS, LIKE RIPE FRUIT.
I'D LOVE TO HAVE A SIP AND SEE HOW IT TASTES...
OUR JUNMAI GINJOSHU IS MADE FROM NOTHING MORE THAN RICE, MALT AND WATER!
BUT NOT OUR SAKE!
The unfiltered is my personal favorite!
Our featured product is a junmai ginjoshu called "Tenkou." We also put out seasonal brews throughout the year.

SPLASH
OH!
Thank you.
YUP. TRY A DAB.
It's delicious.
YOU OUGHT TO TASTE IT! RIGHT, GRANDPA?
JUST A LICK WOULD BE OKAY, RIGHT?
DON'T.
YOU SHOULDN'T RISK IT. DON'T COME CRYING TO ME IF YOU WIND UP IN THE HOSPITAL.
!
PSH
AND YOU TWO!
QUIT PRESSURING HIM TO DRINK!
Hmph...
I'm sorry.
I SWEAR...
NO COMMON SENSE, ANY OF YOU.
TNK
SORRY...
SIGH
BUT...

...I THINK NOW I UNDERSTAND WHY YOUR SAKE IS SO IN DEMAND...
...EVEN THOUGH I HAVEN'T TASTED IT.
YOU KNOW, I WANT AS MANY PEOPLE AS POSSIBLE TO BE ABLE TO DRINK IT...
...SINCE I CAN'T DRINK IT MYSELF!
I KNOW YOU HAVEN'T ACCEPTED ME YET, SIR.
BUT I WON'T STOP COMING HERE AND RUDELY ASKING YOU TO SELL TO US!
AND I WON'T GIVE UP, NO MATTER WHAT YOU THROW AT ME!
HMPH...
EXPECT TO SEE A LOT MORE OF ME!
GOOD LUCK, MUCCHAN! YOU'VE GOT MY SUPPORT!
I'LL SIGN WITH YOU THE SECOND I BECOME HEAD BREWER!
YOU JUST HAVE TO WAIT UNTIL GRANDPA DI- I MEAN, RETIRES!
WHAAT?
"Dies"?
!!
You were about to say "dies"!
Heh...
OKAY!
...
Hey.

D-Did he just smile?
I THINK I SAW A SMILE!
HE'S SMILING! I'VE NEVER SEEN THAT BEFORE!
NAH, I'M DRIVING.
BUT I THOUGHT YOU WERE STAYING OVER TONIGHT.
YOU SAID YOU'D HELP ME WITH INVENTORY TOMOR-ROW...
YEAH. I DUNNO...I JUST DIDN'T FEEL LIKE DRINKING.
ZZZ
ZZZ
CLINK
HMM?
YOU DIDN'T HAVE ANY SAKE?

I SHOULD BE GOING.
I'M SO SORRY FOR ALL THE TROUBLE I CAUSED TODAY.
DID YOU FIND THE BATHROOM OKAY, MUCCHAN?
YES, THANKS.
HUH. THAT'S UNUSUAL.
TUP
I SHOULD SAY GOOD-NIGHT TO THE MASTER OF THE HOUSE...
HE'S ALREADY ASLEEP. I'LL TELL HIM FOR YOU.
ZZZZ
NOW, ARE YOU REALLY ALL RIGHT? YOU AREN'T FEELING DIZZY AT ALL? YOU'RE WELCOME TO STAY OVER.
OH, NO, I COULDN'T POSSIBLY...
I'VE GOT WORK TOMORROW, AND BESIDES, I'M FEELING FINE.
OKAY. TAKE CARE, THEN.
I WILL.
CREAK
LIM...

I'M SORRY ABOUT EVERYTHING TODAY.
I'LL, UH, SEE YOU LA-
HUH?
WAIT HERE AND I'LL BRING THE CAR AROUND.
SWSH
I DROVE HERE.
MIGHT AS WELL DRIVE YOU HOME.
...THANKS.
OH, NOW I GET IT.
MY BROTHER'S SUCH A LIAR.
HUH?
HE DIDN'T DRINK ANYTHING, EVEN THOUGH HE WAS PLANNING TO STAY OVER TONIGHT.
USUALLY HE DRINKS LIKE A FISH.
I WAS WONDERING WHY, BUT NOW IT MAKES SENSE.

I KNOW HE GIVES A LOT OF PEOPLE THE WRONG IDEA...
...BUT HE'S A REALLY SWEET GUY UNDER-NEATH.
MY GRANDPA TOO!
IT WAS SO HE COULD DRIVE YOU HOME.
YEAH.
I CAN SEE THAT.

It was so he could drive you home.

...EY...
I feel so good...
HEY.... HARU... NA...
HARU-NA!
HUH?
WHAT?
EEK
SORRY TO WAKE YOU UP, BUT I DON'T KNOW THE WAY.
WHERE DO I GO FROM HERE?
HUH? WHERE ARE WE?
When I fell asleep?
THE CROSS-WALK JUST PAST THE STREET IN FRONT OF THE TRAIN STATION.
WHICH WAY SHOULD I TURN?
OH, YOU CAN DROP ME OFF HERE.
MY STREET IS ONE-WAY, SO YOU CAN'T TURN ONTO IT.
THANKS A LOT.
SIGH...
Jeez...
I'm such an idiot.
HFF
WHAT IS IT? YOU FEEL SICK AGAIN?
NO...
IT'S NOT THAT...

YOU REALLY DON'T GIVE UP, DO YOU?
Where do you get that unvanquished spirit?
WE WERE ALONE TOGETHER IN CLOSE QUARTERS!
BOOOO
THUNK
I WAS JUST THINKING WHAT A WASTE IT WAS TO SLEEP THROUGH IT.
I DIDN'T GET TO SAVOR THE MOMENT.
...
ALL JOKING ASIDE, WHAT DO I HAVE TO DO TO GET YOU TO GIVE UP ON ME?
YOU SEEM LIKE A DECENT GUY.
AND I DON'T HATE YOU OR ANYTHING, BUT...
I'VE TOLD YOU A DOZEN TIMES...
...I'M NOT INTERESTED IN A RELATIONSHIP.
THEN...

...JUST SAY YOU HATE ME.
CLICK
TELL ME NEVER TO COME NEAR YOU AGAIN.
...
I WON'T GIVE UP UNTIL I GET A DEFINITE NO.
I REALIZE I'M BEING PUSHY HERE.
Heh...
BUT... DON'T DO IT NOW.
I HAD A LOT OF FUN TODAY.
I'D LIKE TO WAIT UNTIL ANOTHER DAY TO FEEL SAD.
CLICK
THANKS FOR DRIVING ME.
SEE YOU.
...
TOK TOK

WAAH
WAAH
STAGGER
HE REALLY SEEMS BOTHERED BY IT. AS MUCH AS IT HURTS, I OUGHTA STOP BUGGING HIM...
HUH? AM I STILL DRUNK?
I GUESS HE'S FINALLY GOING TO TURN ME DOWN.
Not that I ever had much of a chance...
AW, CRAP.
IT'S EVEN WORSE NOW THAT WE'VE GOTTEN TO BE FRIENDS.
THUD
I CAN'T WALK STRAIGHT-
STAGGER
ACK!
WHOA!
WAAH
THWUMP
OOF!
HEY THERE.
Huh?

YOU OKAY?
LOOKS LIKE YOU HAVEN'T SOBERED UP YET.
HUH?
ER...
YOU WERE STAG-GERING AROUND.
JUST WATCHING YOU FREAKED ME OUT.
OH... SORRY.
I WAS FINE UNTIL A MINUTE AGO...
DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT. CAN YOU WALK?
YEAH, I THINK SO.
HERE.
DRINK UP.
THANKS ...
THIS MAKES ONE MORE TIME YOU'VE HAD TO BAIL ME OUT, HUH?
YOU'RE TELLING ME.
I HAVE TO TELL HARUNA TO BE MORE CAREFUL ABOUT THE PROPORTIONS IN HER SAKAMANJU.
PIKK
PIKK
Sigh...
...

SINCE WE'RE SO CLOSE, MAYBE IT'D BE QUICKEST TO JUST DRAG YOU THERE MYSELF.
HMM...
IF I BRING THE CAR AROUND, CAN YOU GET IN?
SO WHICH ONE'S YOUR PLACE? THAT BROWN APARTMENT BUILDING?
OH... YEAH, THAT'S IT.
NAKAGAWA-SAN...
...YOU MAKE THINGS SO HARD FOR ME.

YOU'RE SO COLD...
...BUT YOU'RE NICE TOO.
YOU'RE SUCH A BASTARD.
I'M NOT NICE.
SURE YOU ARE.
AND YOU'RE COLD.
WHICH IS IT?
I WANT TO KEEP ON LOVING YOU JUST A LITTLE LONGER...
...YOU DO SOMETHING LIKE THIS AND I LOSE ALL MY RESOLUTION.
EVERY TIME I TELL MYSELF TO GIVE UP ON YOU...

HA HA...
HA...
I DON'T STAND A CHANCE, DO I?
SORRY.
IT'S OKAY...
SNIFF
...
SNIFF
SOB
SOB
SOB
SNIFF
SNIFF
HEY, DON'T YOU GET SNOT ON ME!
SNIFF
SNIFF
HAVE SOME PITY, NAKAGAWA-SAN.
I'M TRYING TO WALLOW IN SORROW HERE!
SO?
SNIFF
CAN I ASK YOU ONE THING?
HMM?
THE HEARTBREAK THAT MADE YOU STOP BELIEVING IN LOVE...
WHAT WAS IT LIKE?

C'MON, TELL ME.
WHAT MAKES YOU THINK I HAD MY HEART BROKEN?
YOU DID. DIDN'T YOU?
...
IF YOU DON'T ANSWER, I'LL GET SNOT ON YOU!
SNIFF
HEY, KNOCK IT OFF!
...
THE FIRST WOMAN I REALLY FELL IN LOVE WITH...
...TURNED OUT TO BE MARRIED.
DON'T YOU DARE TELL ANY-ONE.
I WON'T.
SO YOUR FIRST LOVE WAS AN AFFAIR?
THAT'S REALLY PAINFUL. I DATED A MAN WITH A WIFE AND KIDS ONCE. AND I WAS MISERABLE.
YOU DID, HUH?
I DID.

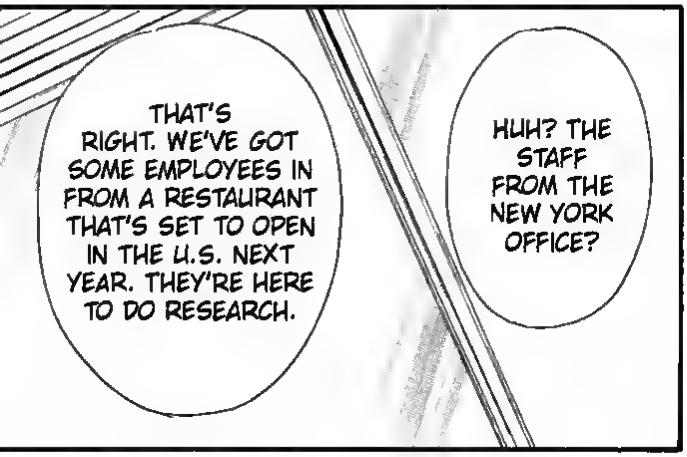
Damn.
THAT LITTLE PIECE OF PAPER, HUH?
YOU MAY BE RIGHT...
Is that so?
I was just a toy to him!
THE BOND FORMED BY THAT LITTLE PIECE OF PAPER TURNED OUT TO BE A LOT STRONGER THAN I THOUGHT.
YOU'RE GETTING WORKED UP ALL OVER AGAIN.
AND HIS MARRIAGE WAS ON THE ROCKS!
Why do the guys who turn me down...
HEY.
YOU'LL PROBABLY SAY NO, BUT I'M GOING TO ASK ANYWAY.
CAN I KISS YOU?
...always have to be so damn attractive?
...
There's that look again.
SO IS THAT A NO?
WHAT DO YOU... WHY ARE YOU EVEN ASKING?
WHAT KIND OF SENSE DOES THAT MAKE?

HELL NO.
YOU SERIOUSLY NEED TO THINK BEFORE YOU OPEN YOUR MOUTH.
I THOUGHT IT MIGHT BE...
SNIFF
...A GOOD FINAL MEMORY.
JUST LET ME STAY LIKE THIS FOR A SECOND. I PROMISE NOT TO GET SNOT ON YOU.
I'LL BE OKAY. I'M USED TO GUYS TURNING ME DOWN...
UH...
YEAH, SORRY.
HEY THERE...
...
...
THIS WHOLE NIGHT HAS BEEN SO EMBAR-RASSING ...
HA HA...
I JUST CRY REALLY EASILY WHEN I'M DRUNK.
But being used to it doesn't make it hurt any less.

IS THAT BETTER?
ARE YOU SATISFIED NOW?

IT WAS SO SUDDEN, I WASN'T READY FOR IT!
K...KISS ME ONE MORE TIME!
WHAT DO YOU MEAN, SAVOR IT?
You're a freak...
I COULDN'T SAVOR IT AT ALL!
ONE MORE KISS!
NO WAY!
WHAT?
H...
!
GRP
PLEASE. JUST ONE MORE...
HEY...
NOT ONLY THAT, YOU'RE PERSISTENT AS HELL.
YEAH ...
SORRY... HA HA...
YEAH ...
YOU REALLY ARE FOR-WARD...
...AREN'T YOU?
...

HARUNA!
YES?
I'M SORRY TO ASK THIS, BUT WOULD YOU MIND TAGGING ALONG WITH THE NEW YORK TEAM FOR THE NEXT TEN DAYS OR SO?


HUH? THE STAFF FROM THE NEW YORK OFFICE?
THAT'S RIGHT. WE'VE GOT SOME EMPLOYEES IN FROM A RESTAURANT THAT'S SET TO OPEN IN THE U.S. NEXT YEAR. THEY'RE HERE TO DO RESEARCH.

DO YOU NEED ME TO INTER-PRET?
THEY'VE GOT TRANSLATORS WITH THEM, BUT THEY WANT TO EXPLORE THE CITY A LITTLE, SO I'D LIKE YOU TO SHOW THEM AROUND.
OKAY, BUT...

THAT'S RIGHT. PLEASE BE POLITE.
OH, GOOD QUESTION. I'LL GO MYSELF.
THEY'LL BEGIN BREWING SOON, SO THIS IS A CRUCIAL PERIOD!
...WHO WILL GO TO WAKA-TAKE?
NO WAY CAN I TELL HIM I WAS DRUNK...
OH, YES...I'M FINE NOW.
IT WAS JUST A LITTLE ANEMIA. SORRY TO HAVE WORRIED YOU.
BY THE WAY, HOW ARE YOU FEELING? I HEARD YOU PASSED OUT AT WAKATAKE YESTERDAY.
RIGHT. GLAD TO HEAR IT.
I CAN SEE HOW THAT BREWER SCREAMING AT YOU EVERY DAY WOULD STRESS YOU OUT.
NO, NO, IT WASN'T THAT AT ALL...
IT'S SETTLED, THEN! STARTING TODAY, I'LL GO TO WAKATAKE!
HUH?
OH...I COULD GO TODAY...
YOU'RE EXCUSED FROM THE WAKATAKE VISITS FOR THE TIME BEING. JUST LEAVE IT TO ME, HARUNA.
THANKS TO YOU, THE BREWER SEEMS TO HAVE SOFTENED UP QUITE A BIT!
...

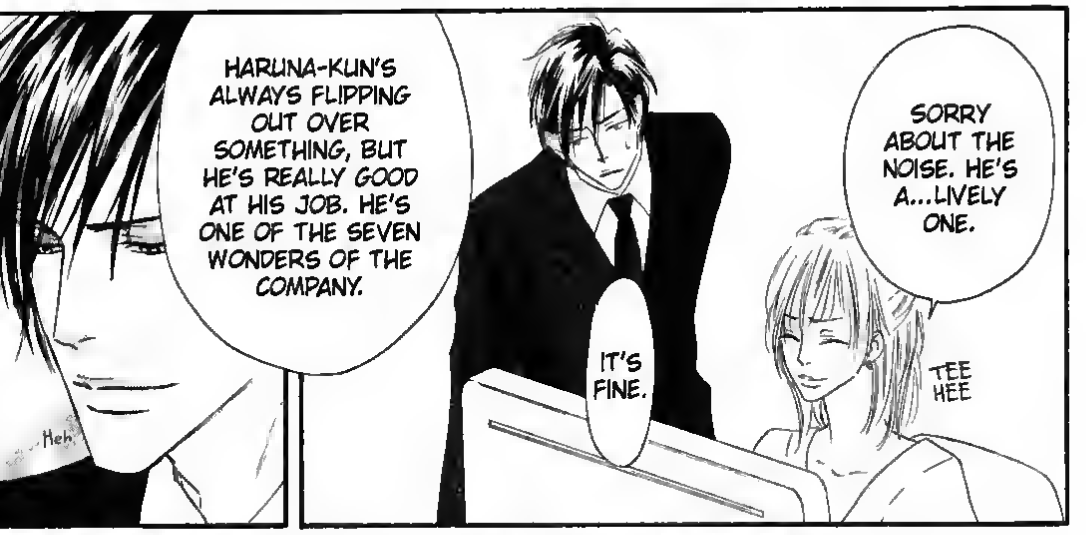
YOU GO ENJOY YOURSELF, NOW!
YES, SIR...
FREED FROM WAKATAKE! LUCKY YOU!
NO LONGER WILL YOU FEAR BEING FELLED BY A FLYING CRUTCH!
HUH?
OH... YEAH, BUT...
MUTTER
NOW I DON'T HAVE AN EXCUSE TO SEE HIM...
HUH? WHAT WAS THAT?
OH, NOTHING.
HMPH
I GUESS I MIGHT SEE HIM AT THE OFFICE ONCE IN A WHILE, BUT WHAT ARE THE CHANCES OF THAT?
AFTER ALL, I'VE ONLY RUN INTO HIM HERE ONCE...
NO, WAIT.
?
Next time I see him...
...he's going to tell me to go away.

That's enough.
At least...
...I got one kiss.
Time to give up on him.
GOOD MORNING ...
HARUNA, YOU LOOK LIKE CRAP WARMED OVER. I THOUGHT YOU WERE A MORNING PERSON!
Ha ha ha...
WAAH
MORNING
WAAH

ALL SIX OF THEM WANTED TO GO DIFFERENT PLACES. THEY WANTED TO EAT THIS, THEY COULDN'T EAT THAT...
ARE YOU KIDDING ME?
ARGH!
I'M NOT A TOUR GUIDE!
It's been a while!
Hey, Haruna-kun! Long time no see!
YOU WENT TO NARITA TO SEE THE NEW YORK TEAM OFF, RIGHT?
DID THEY LEAVE IN ONE PIECE?
THEY'RE ON THEIR WAY HOME, ALL RIGHT.
BUT THEY HAD ME RUNNING AROUND AT THE LAST MINUTE FOR SOUVENIRS!
Ha ha ha... SOUNDS LIKE A ROUGH TEN DAYS.
AT WAKA-TAKE. I think.
YEAH, BUT I NEED TO MAKE MY REPORT FIRST. WHERE'S THE MANAGER?
Want some coffee?
Haruna...
Please!
YOU'VE REALLY SUFFERED, HUH?
AT LEAST YOU'VE GOT THE AFTERNOON OFF. GO TAKE IT EASY!
Hi there, Mucchan!
Now that I don't have to go, I kind of miss it.
I even miss getting yelled at...
That's right. I haven't been there in ten days.
WAKA-TAKE?

EXCUSE ME, NAKAGAWA-SAN.
COULD YOU TAKE A LOOK AT THIS ONE TOO?
...
Nakagawa-san...I don't even know his first name...
...
SIGH...
Just one more time, even if he has the same old expression on his face.
I do want to see him again.
Huh?!
Nakagawa-san!
THUNK
...Oh.
...
...
No way! This must be destiny!
It's him!

That's right! He was going to turn me down the next time we saw each other!
OH...
No...I'm not ready yet...
NO!
NOT YET!
NOOO...
Haruna?
...
STOMP STOMP
WOW, WHAT WAS THAT? I WONDER WHAT'S GOTTEN INTO HARUNA-KUN!

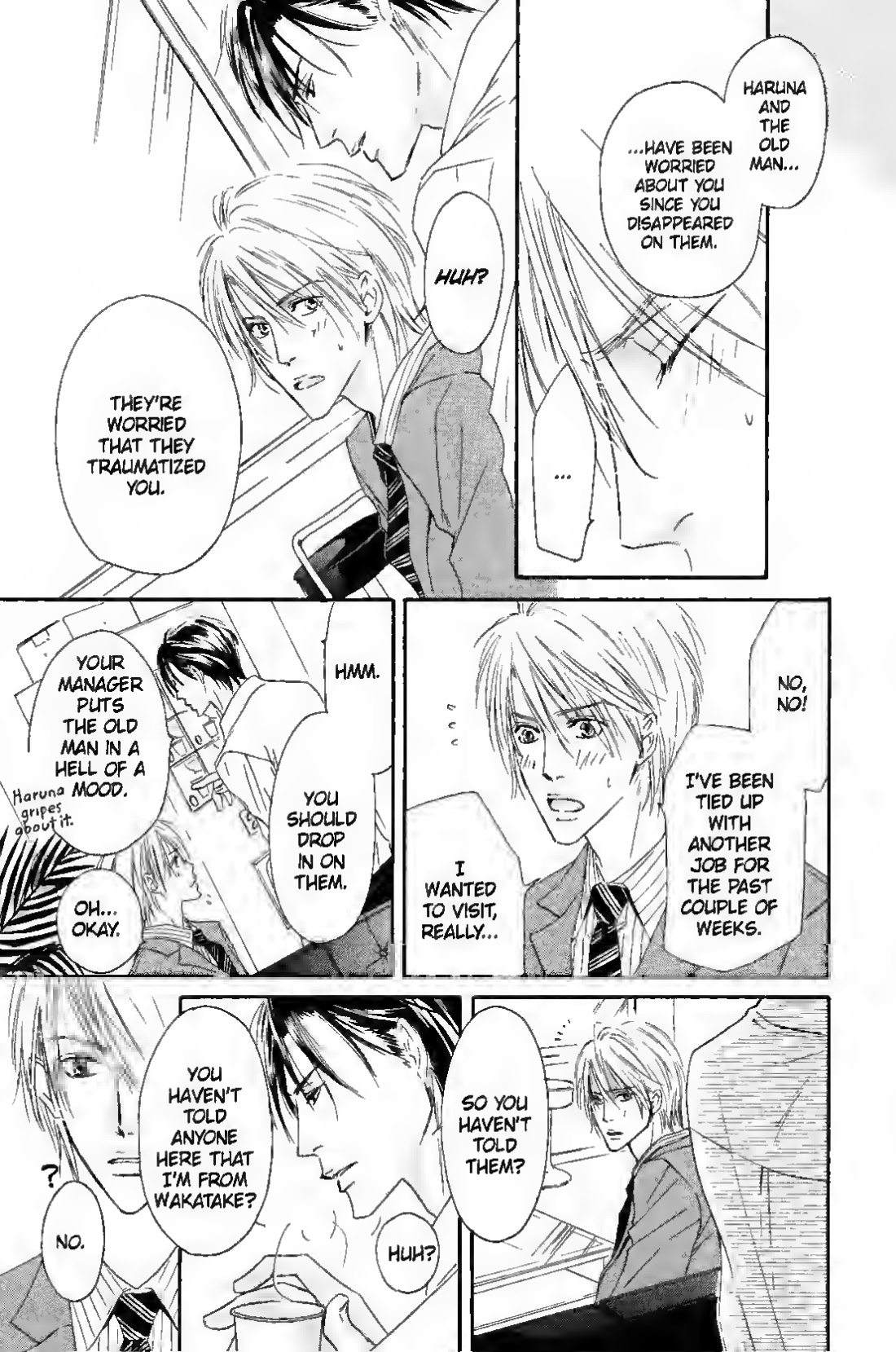

SORRY ABOUT THE NOISE. HE'S A...LIVELY ONE.
IT'S FINE.
TEE HEE
HARUNA-KUN'S ALWAYS FLIPPING OUT OVER SOMETHING, BUT HE'S REALLY GOOD AT HIS JOB. HE'S ONE OF THE SEVEN WONDERS OF THE COMPANY.
...Heh.

HAVE YOU MET HIM BEFORE?
...YES.
WE TALKED FOR A MINUTE IN THE BREAK ROOM.
HE'S A LOT OF FUN TO TALK TO JUST BECAUSE HE'S SO WEIRD!
Too bad... he's cute.

HE'S OUT OF THE OFFICE A LOT, THOUGH, SO I GUESS YOU WOULDN'T RUN INTO HIM MUCH.
Tenkou
PSST.
IS HE GONE?
WHO, THE MANAGER? HE'S NOT BACK YET.
PEEP
SIGH
OH, IT'S JUST YOU, TOKUI.
"JUST" ME? How rude...
If you're gonna sleep here, just go home.
HARUNA? WHAT'RE YOU DOING?
YIPE
?!
HUH?
NOT HIM.
NEVER MIND.

HARUNA, HAVE YOU EATEN TODAY?
ONISHI-SAN'S TAKING ORDERS FOR BENTO LUNCHES.
SIGH
NO THANKS. I'M NOT HUNGRY.
It's not that I *want* to run away from him.
I want to see him and talk to him again.
But the next time I see him...
...will be the last.
?
Man, even *I* think I'm too persistent.
By hiding, I'm just prolonging the inevitable, but still...
...
HEY, TOKUI. YOU KNOW THE COMPUTER GUY WHO WAS ON THE FLOOR EARLIER?
IS HE STILL...?
Love really never...
SQUIK
DID YOU NEED SOME-THING?
...goes the way you want it to.

EEEK!
!!
HEY.
H...
HI...
UH...
MM...
Dammit, he's so hot...
...
I guess I can't run away forever.
SHOOP
...
...


HARUNA AND THE OLD MAN...
...HAVE BEEN WORRIED ABOUT YOU SINCE YOU DISAPPEARED ON THEM.
...
HUH?
THEY'RE WORRIED THAT THEY TRAUMATIZED YOU.
NO, NO!
I'VE BEEN TIED UP WITH ANOTHER JOB FOR THE PAST COUPLE OF WEEKS.
I WANTED TO VISIT, REALLY...
HMM.
YOUR MANAGER PUTS THE OLD MAN IN A HELL OF A MOOD.
Haruna gripes about it.
YOU SHOULD DROP IN ON THEM.
OH... OKAY.
SO YOU HAVEN'T TOLD THEM?
HUH?
YOU HAVEN'T TOLD ANYONE HERE THAT I'M FROM WAKATAKE?
?
NO.

THIS COMPANY IS ONE OF MY EMPLOYER'S MOST IMPORTANT CLIENTS.
IF YOU'D PRESSURED ME TO NEGOTIATE WITH MY GRANDFATHER, I COULDN'T HAVE SAID NO.
YOU THINK I WAS... USING YOU?
I THOUGHT THAT WAS WHY YOU WERE COZYING UP TO ME.
YOU COULD USE ME TO GET CLOSER TO WAKATAKE, RIGHT?
WHY NOT?
I NEVER EVEN THOUGHT ABOUT IT!
I WOULD NEVER...
...USE YOU LIKE THAT!
DON'T SAY THAT!
...
I'D NEVER DO ANYTHING SO DISHONEST!
THAT'S ALL. IT WAS LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT.
I JUST... LIKED YOU.

OUR CONVERSATION THE OTHER DAY...
OH...
CHK
OH, THAT'S RIGHT. I FORGOT.
ONE OF THE SEVEN WONDERS...
HUH?
NOTHING.
I'M SUPPOSED TO GIVE YOU AN ULTIMATUM, RIGHT?
SQUIK
MM...
Oh no, here it comes...
THERE YOU ARE, NAKAGAWA-SAN!
I'M SORRY, BUT I'D LIKE YOU TO TAKE A LOOK AT ONE MORE THING BEFORE YOU GO.
!!
SURE, I'LL BE RIGHT THERE.
IT CAN WAIT UNTIL YOU'VE FINISHED YOUR BREAK.

HERE.
I DIDN'T DRINK MUCH OF THIS.
UH... THANKS.
...
SIGH
OH WELL.
MAYBE NEXT TIME.
OH.
HA HA HA...
...
HEY!
FREAK!
But he had his lips on it.
IT'S AN INDIRECT KISS!
♡
Just kidding.
Do whatever you want. Sigh...
...

it's enough to give me a big head!
He didn't say it...
...even though it would've been the easiest thing in the world.
There I go, always looking for the silver lining...
But that's okay.
HEH HEH...
HELLO!
I'M STARVING, KOCHAN! FEED ME!
Kochan's Kitchen
SHICK
WHY, MUTSUKI-CHAN! COME ON IN!
WAIT'LL YOU SEE WHO'S HERE!
HEY.
OH!

YOSUKE!
WHAT'RE YOU DOING HERE? WHEN DID YOU GET BACK FROM PARIS?
I GOT IN LAST WEEK.
I'M HERE FOR MY SISTER'S WEDDING. I'M GOING BACK THE DAY AFTER TOMORROW.
How long's it been?
About a year.
CHAK
YOU SHOULD'VE LET ME KNOW YOU WERE BACK!
WE SHOULD AT LEAST HAVE DINNER.
I GUESS, BUT...
SO HOW'S YOUR TRAINING GOING? IS IT FUN LEARNING TO BE A PASTRY CHEF?
Bonjour! Merci beaucoup! C'est très bon!
Don't I sound cool in French?
IT SURE IS! AND I'M PRETTY FLUENT IN FRENCH NOW. MY LIFE THERE IS SO FULFILLING!
I'll have oolong tea and whatever the special is.
WHY?
WE HAD AN AMICABLE DIVORCE.
DON'T CALL IT THAT.
...IT'S KIND OF WEIRD TO GO OUT OF YOUR WAY TO GET IN TOUCH WITH YOUR EX-BOYFRIEND.
SHOOP
I'M IN LOVE!
WITH A REALLY HOT GUY!
GASP
HUH?
GUESS WHAT, YOSUKE?
GUESS WHAT? GUESS WHAT?
HOW'S WORK GO-
HOW ABOUT YOU, MUTSUKI?

Don't get all x-rated just because I don't have any other customers in here!
IF I KNOW YOU, MUTSUKI, YOU FELL FOR ANOTHER HOT STRAIGHT GUY.
HOW'D YOU KNOW?
YOU ALWAYS END UP GETTING HURT THAT WAY.
You haven't changed at all.
GOD, YOU'RE JUST THE SAME AS EVER!
IS THAT THE KIND OF THING TO TELL AN EX YOU HAVEN'T SEEN IN AGES?
BUT THERE ISN'T ANYONE ELSE I CAN TELL! DON'T BE LIKE THAT! I NEED YOU TO LISTEN!
OKAY, OKAY ...
BUT ONCE I GOT TO KNOW HIM, HE STARTED OPENING UP...
...AND HE EVEN SMILED AT ME! AND THEN THE OTHER DAY...
I MEAN, HE CAN BE KIND OF COOL, YOU KNOW, SORT OF UNFRIENDLY... AT FIRST HE WAS A REAL JERK!
I GUESS, BUT THIS TIME THINGS SEEM TO BE GOING PRETTY WELL!
SHICK
HELLO?
SORRY I'M SO LATE.
I KNOW, RIGHT?
I'M HOPING FOR A MIRACLE HERE!
HUG
Whoa there!
...HE KISSED ME!!
FOR REAL?
GOOD FOR YOU...
I sort of made him, but still!

God, you're so annoying...
Huh?
What a hunk!
NO HARUNA-CHAN TODAY, HUH?
WHY, THANK YOU!
WILL THIS BE ENOUGH?
I BROUGHT YOUR SAKE FOR THE WEEK.
天香

?
UH-OH!
You know him?
And get off me! You're heavy!
OH, NAKAGAWA-SAN!
DO YOU DELIVER HERE? I DIDN'T KNOW THAT!
What a coincidence!
...
HERE'S YOUR RECEIPT. SEE YA.
THANKS A LOT. YOUR SAKE IS THE BEST!

BAM
He's ignoring me!
BLARG
ACK!
HEY... WHAT?
SHOVE
UM, COULD YOU WAIT A MOMENT?
SLIP-OUT

THUNK
NAKAGAWA-SAN!
HEY, NAKAGAWA-SAN!
WAIT UP! WHY ARE YOU IGNORING ME? ARE YOU ANGRY ABOUT SOMETHING?
GIVE IT UP.
I'M DONE WITH YOU.
YOU'RE SO GODDAMN ANNOYING.
I HATE PEOPLE LIKE YOU.
FROM NOW ON, JUST LEAVE ME ALONE.

DO YOU, MUTSUKI-CHA....?
DO YOU KNOW THE GUY FROM WAKATAKE?
WHERE'D YOU RUN OFF TO, MUTSUKI-CHAN?
SO YOU FINALLY CAME BACK.
SHICK
!!
...TO END UP HATING ME...
IF...IF HE WAS JUST GOING...
HEY, MUT-SUKI!
MUTSUKI-CHAN! WHAT IS IT?

MUTSUKI-CHAN...
DON'T TELL ME THAT'S THE GUY YOU'RE IN LOVE WITH!
I'M SO STUPID! STUPID, STUPID, STUPID!
...I SHOULD'VE GIVEN UP ON HIM RIGHT AWAY!
WAIT, HOW DO YOU KNOW HIM?
SOB
I DIDN'T KNOW YOU CARRIED SAKE FROM WAKA-TAKE.
Closed
BUT...
Here's a towel.
YOU'RE SUCH A FOOL, MUTSUKI-CHAN.
FALLING FOR A PAIN IN THE ASS LIKE HIM...
SNIFF
THIS PLACE IS FAMOUS FOR IT. PEOPLE COME HERE JUST TO SAMPLE A CUP!
OH, I SEE...
But I guess you wouldn't know that if you don't drink
PUBBT
MY DAD'S A FRIEND OF THE MASTER BREWER THERE.
THAT'S HOW WE'RE ABLE TO GET OUR HANDS ON THE ELUSIVE TENKOU!
ARE YOU KIDDING? WE'VE ALWAYS CARRIED THEIR TENKOU.
天香

I'M NOT SURPRISED. I DON'T THINK IT'D EVER WORK WITH HIM AND SOMEONE LIKE YOU.
WHAT DO YOU MEAN, SOME-ONE LIKE ME?
Stop crying... You're not a little kid.
DEAD SERIOUS!
EVEN THOUGH HE JUST TURNED ME DOWN... AND RIPPED ME A NEW ONE...
THE POINT IS, ARE YOU SERIOUS...
...ABOUT THAT KID FROM WAKATAKE?
YEAH, THAT GUY IS A REAL STRAIGHT ARROW.
NOT the type to go for Mutsuki.
GET OFF MY CASE!
I'M NOT FLIGHTY!
YOU KNOW... YOU'RE SO FLIGHTY, ALWAYS FALLING IN LOVE AT THE DROP OF A HAT...
But it doesn't leave this room, okay?
HMM... SHOULD I INDULGE IN GOSSIP? I GUESS IT WAS ALL A LONG TIME AGO...
THIS ALL HAPPENED ABOUT TEN YEARS BACK...
YOU SEEM TO KNOW A LOT ABOUT HIM, KOCHAN. HOW COME?
OH, WELL ...
THERE WAS A BIT OF A SCANDAL SURROUNDING THAT KID.
A SCAN-DAL?

WHEN HE WAS IN HIGH SCHOOL, HE FELL IN LOVE WITH A SALESWOMAN FROM A RESTAURANT THAT DID BUSINESS WITH WAKATAKE.
UNFORTUNATELY, THE WOMAN WAS MARRIED!
BUT TRUE LOVE DOESN'T CARE ABOUT SUCH DETAILS, DOES IT?
HE RAN AWAY FROM HOME AFTER THE TWO OF THEM TALKED ABOUT RUNNING OFF TOGETHER. HE WAITED AT THE PLACE THEY'D AGREED TO MEET, BUT SHE NEVER SHOWED UP.
WHEN PUSH CAME TO SHOVE, SHE CHOSE HER HUSBAND.
THAT LITTLE PIECE OF PAPER, HUH?
A CRUEL TRICK TO PLAY ON A TEENAGER, WASN'T IT?
MAYBE SHE PANICKED WHEN THINGS SUDDENLY GOT TOO REAL.
LATER THE HUSBAND FOUND OUT AND STORMED OVER TO WAKATAKE IN A RAGE. APPARENTLY HE CAUSED A HUGE SCENE.
I HATE PEOPLE...
I THINK THE WHOLE ORDEAL SCARRED HIM A LITTLE. IT'S STILL HARD FOR HIM TO TAKE THE INITIATIVE IN RELATION-SHIPS.
AT ANY RATE, HE AND YOU ARE JUST TOO DIFFER-ENT.
...LIKE YOU.

WHOA!
MUCCHAN, WHAT HAPPENED?
YOUR EYES ARE BRIGHT RED!
And swollen!
HA HA... IT'S OKAY...
DID YOU GET IN TROUBLE WITH YOUR BOSS BECAUSE GRANDPA'S STILL HOLDING OUT?
OH NO! IT'S NOTHING LIKE THAT...
...

I KNOW IT'S HARD...
...BUT YOU NEED TO KNOW WHEN TO GIVE UP.

I spent the night crying after your brother turned me down.
NOT THAT I CAN TELL HER THAT...
BETTER LIE...
MY CONTACTS ARE IRRITATING ME, THAT'S ALL.
ER, IS YOUR GRANDPA HERE?
NO, HE AND MY BROTHER WENT TO VISIT ONE OF OUR CONTRACT FARMERS.
CONTRACT FARMERS?
THEY GROW OUR RICE. IT'S ALMOST BREWING SEASON!
IS THAT SO?
Thank god. I don't know what I'd even say to him.
Although...
...I'd like to at least set that misunderstanding straight.
ARE YOU SORRY YOU DON'T GET TO SEE MY BROTHER?
WH-WHAT?!
WHY WOULD I BE?!
BDMP
OH CRAP, OH CRAP...
BDMP
BDMP
ER... UM...I DO?
BDMP
Tee hee...
YOU ALWAYS SEEM A LITTLE DISAPPOINTED WHEN HE'S NOT AROUND.
YOU SURE DO!
HA HA...
I'M JUST THRILLED THAT SOMEONE'S WILLING TO BE FRIENDS WITH MY CRABBY BROTHER!
I hope you stay close!
HA HA...

WE'RE GOING TO START BREWING SOON...
...AND WE ALWAYS HIRE LIVE-IN WORKERS FROM THE COUNTRY.
THEY'RE ALL OLDER MEN, WAY OLDER THAN ME.
MUCCHAN, CAN YOU SAY SOMETHING TO MY BROTHER FOR ME, AS HIS FRIEND?
CONVINCE HIM TO HELP ME OUT AT THE DISTILLERY.
HUH?
YUP!
SO...I DON'T KNOW...I TEND TO BE TOO POLITE, AND SOMETIMES THAT CAUSES TROUBLE WITH THE WORKERS.
I KNOW THAT'S NO EXCUSE, SINCE I'M THE ONE IN CHARGE HERE, BUT THEY'RE ALL SO MUCH MORE EXPERIENCED THAN I AM.
THEY DON'T ALWAYS TAKE KINDLY TO A YOUNG WOMAN BOSSING THEM AROUND!
YOU SEE, I WANT TO MAKE A NEW SAKE.
I WANT TO MAKE A SAKE THAT SMELLS LIKE APPLE BLOSSOMS.
THE KIND OF SAKE THAT WOULD BE A HIT WITH YOUNG WOMEN.
A SAKE THAT SMELLS LIKE APPLE BLOS-SOMS?
THAT'S A GREAT IDEA!
I THINK SO TOO!

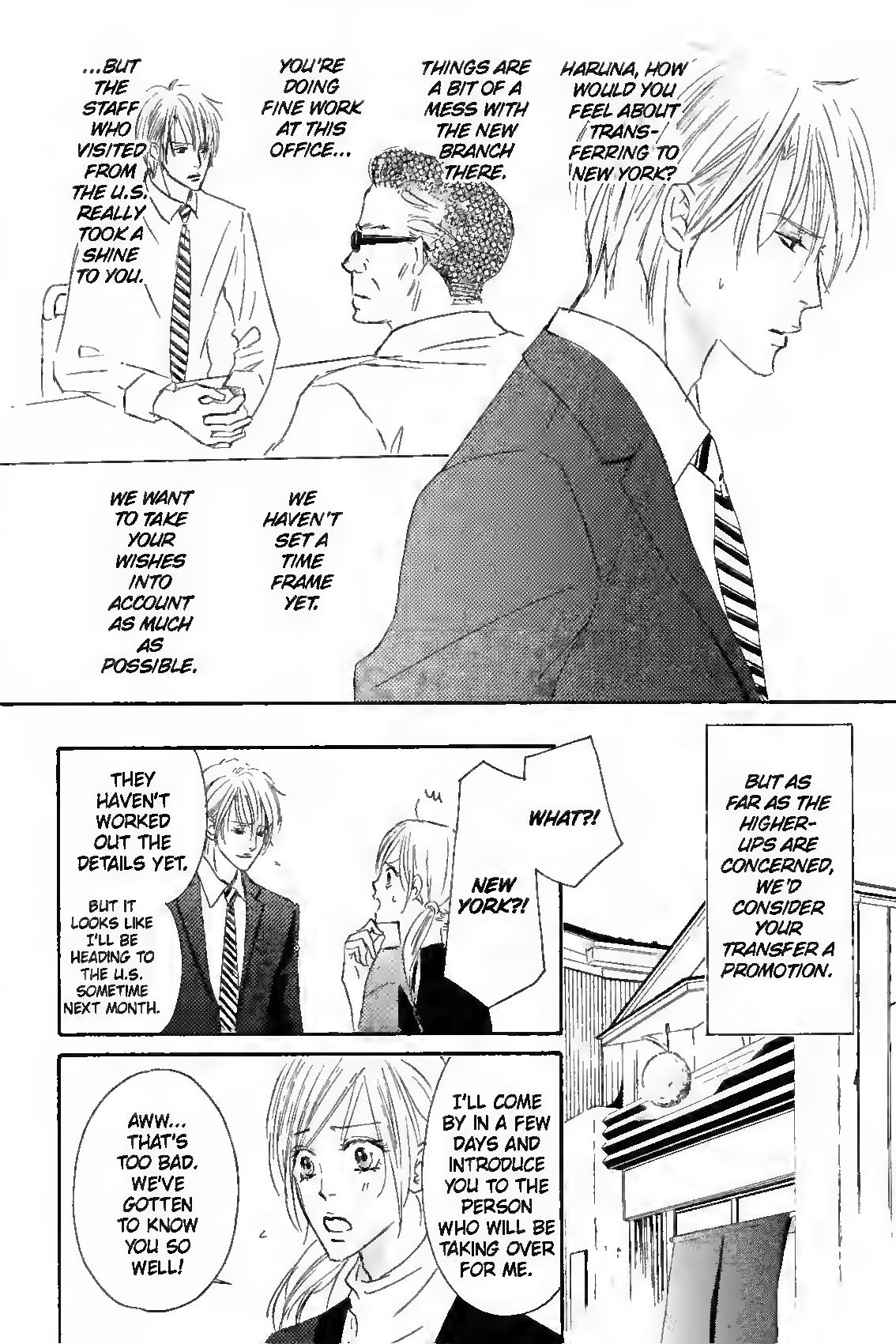
DOES HE ENJOY HIS JOB?
AFTER ALL, HE'D HAVE TO QUIT HIS JOB IN COMPUTER ENGINEERING.
THAT'S ANOTHER REASON I WANT MY BROTHER HERE. WITH HIM, I CAN SPEAK FREELY ABOUT MY IDEAS.
BUT EVEN THOUGH HE'LL HELP ME WITH DELIVERIES, HE WON'T HELP WITH THE BREWING.
Oh...
IT CAUSED A LOT OF PROBLEMS ...
...SO NOW HE THINKS OF THIS PLACE AS OFF-LIMITS.
SIGH
A FEW YEARS AGO, HE WAS INVOLVED IN SOME TROUBLE AT THE DISTILLERY.
NO, I DON'T THINK SO.
I THINK THAT DEEP DOWN...
...MY BROTHER WANTS TO MAKE SAKE.
Oh no...
Later the husband found out and stormed over to Wakatake in a rage. Apparently he caused a huge scene.

AFTER ALL...
...ALL OUR HAPPIEST MEMORIES ARE OF PLAYING HERE WHEN WE WERE KIDS AND WATCHING OUR GRANDPA MAKE SAKE.
I KNOW HE LOVES WAKATAKE...
...JUST AS MUCH AS I DO.
Me too!
I'm gonna be a brewer when I grow up!
Grandpa's so cool!
I CAN SEE THAT.
HA HA... LISTEN TO ME GOING ON AND ON!
I'm developing a new manju recipe!
SAY, MUCCHAN, DO YOU WANT SOME TEA?
THANKS, BUT I'VE GOT SOME OTHER STOPS I NEED TO MAKE. NEXT TIME, OKAY?
GIVE MY REGARDS TO YOUR GRAND-FATHER! I'LL BE BACK!
OKAY!

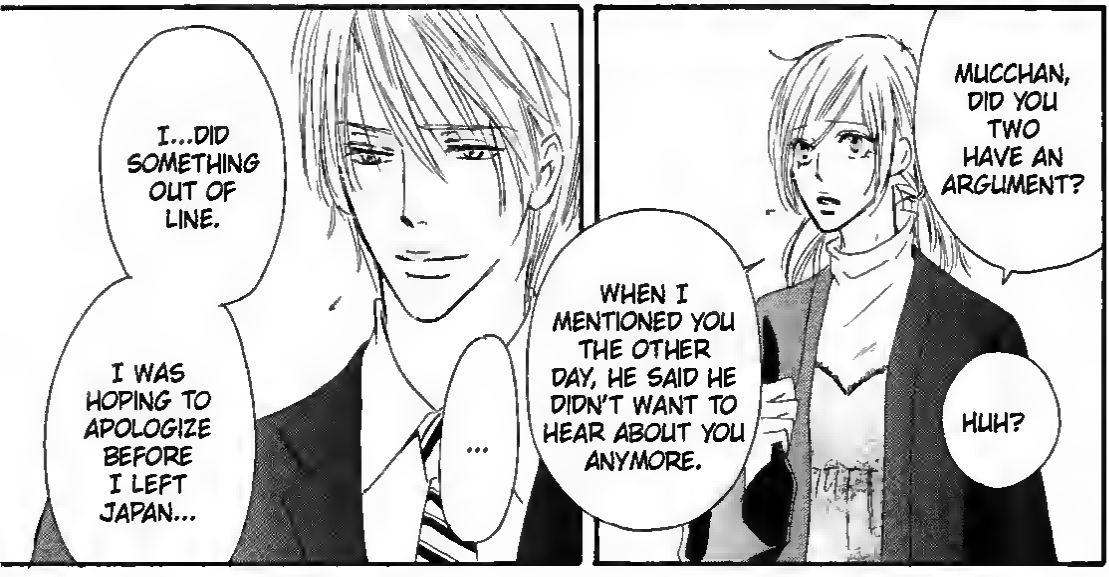
YES?
OH, NEVER MIND. I'LL SEE YOU LATER.
OKAY! TILL NEXT TIME!
FROM NOW ON, JUST LEAVE ME ALONE.
AND...
...
TNK
How...
HA HA...
...do I usually get over a broken heart?
I don't know.
I FEEL LIKE...
...I'LL NEVER FALL IN LOVE AGAIN.

C'mon!
HAR-OOOO-NA...
SNAP OUT OF IT!
HUH? OH, SORRY. WHAT'S UP?
SHOOF
HEY, HARUNA!
HEY, HARUNA. I'VE GOT THE MENU FOR OUR NEW FRANCHISE AND...
WHAT'S WITH YOU? JUST A COUPLE DAYS AGO YOU WERE BOUNCING OFF THE WALLS!
IS THIS ABOUT THE WAKATAKE ACCOUNT?
WHAT? NO, IT'S NOT...
ALTHOUGH... IT KIND OF IS? NO... MAYBE...
WHICH IS IT?
YOU NEED TO CHECK THE ENGLISH ON THIS MENU.
OKAY, SURE.
...
HEY, THAT'S RIGHT! HE LOOKED LIKE CRAP!
COME ON! REMEMBER HOW HE MOPED AROUND THE OTHER DAY WITH HIS EYES ALL RED AND SWOLLEN?
A clear sign of heart-break!
"NO... ER...
WHAT? REALLY?
IT'S DEFINITELY A BROKEN HEART.
Yup!
HRMPH
NO WAY. THIS HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH WORK.
Huh?

FLASHING BACK...
...
HEY, HARUNA!
THAT'S RIGHT! I'M SURE YOU GET DOZENS OF OFFERS! YOU'LL BE FINE!
C'MON, SHAKE IT OFF!
YOU'LL FIND SOMEONE NEW!
...
GLOOOM
BINGO!
He's way too obvious.
The conference room?
What now?
YES, SIR.
YES, SIR?
CAN I SEE YOU FOR A MINUTE?
MEET ME IN THE CONFERENCE ROOM. THERE'S SOMETHING I WANT TO DISCUSS.
UM, OKAY...
SHOOF
SORRY, I'LL TELL YOU LATER!
I NEED TO GO TO WAKATAKE.
OH, HARUNA.
WHAT WAS SUCH A BIG DEAL YOU HAD TO GO INTO THE CONFERENCE ROOM?


...BUT THE STAFF WHO VISITED FROM THE U.S. REALLY TOOK A SHINE TO YOU.
YOU'RE DOING FINE WORK AT THIS OFFICE...
THINGS ARE A BIT OF A MESS WITH THE NEW BRANCH THERE.
HARUNA, HOW WOULD YOU FEEL ABOUT TRANSFERRING TO NEW YORK?
WE WANT TO TAKE YOUR WISHES INTO ACCOUNT AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE.
WE HAVEN'T SET A TIME FRAME YET.
THEY HAVEN'T WORKED OUT THE DETAILS YET.
BUT IT LOOKS LIKE I'LL BE HEADING TO THE U.S. SOMETIME NEXT MONTH.
WHAT?!
NEW YORK?!
BUT AS FAR AS THE HIGHER-UPS ARE CONCERNED, WE'D CONSIDER YOUR TRANSFER A PROMOTION.
AWW... THAT'S TOO BAD. WE'VE GOTTEN TO KNOW YOU SO WELL!
I'LL COME BY IN A FEW DAYS AND INTRODUCE YOU TO THE PERSON WHO WILL BE TAKING OVER FOR ME.

AND I KNOW GRANDPA LIKES YOU TOO!
HA HA...
Yeah, sure.
...
SO...
...IS YOUR BROTHER IN?
HE'S CLEANING THE BREWERY FLOOR.


MUCCHAN, DID YOU TWO HAVE AN ARGUMENT?
HUH?
WHEN I MENTIONED YOU THE OTHER DAY, HE SAID HE DIDN'T WANT TO HEAR ABOUT YOU ANYMORE.
...
I...DID SOMETHING OUT OF LINE.
I WAS HOPING TO APOLOGIZE BEFORE I LEFT JAPAN...

CAN I GO INTO THE BREWERY?
CHK
CHK

HELLO.

I'M NOT HERE TO VISIT. I JUST WANT TO TALK TO YOU ABOUT SOMETHING.
I'M SURE YOU WON'T LISTEN, BUT I'M GOING TO SAY IT ANYWAY.
I...

I'M BEING TRANS-FERRED TO NEW YORK NEXT MONTH.
I'M NOT SURE HOW LONG I'LL BE THERE...
...BUT IT MIGHT BE PERMANENT.
SO YOU DON'T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT EVER SEEING ME AGAIN.

BUT BEFORE I GO, I WANT TO SET THINGS STRAIGHT.
THAT GUY THE OTHER DAY...HE'S JUST AN EX. WE HADN'T SEEN EACH OTHER IN MONTHS.
I JUST GOT SO EXCITED TELLING HIM HOW I WAS IN LOVE, AND TALKING ABOUT HOW HAPPY I WAS, AND...
I KNOW.
WHAT?
THAT MOTOR-MOUTH WHO RUNS THE BAR STOPPED ME AND MADE ME LISTEN TO THE WHOLE DAMN STORY.
Kochan...
OH...
SO... THEN...
IT DOESN'T CHANGE ANYTHING.
THIS IS OVER.

HEY, WHAT'S YOUR NAME?
WHAT?
TELL ME YOUR FIRST NAME.
WHAT FOR?
AND I MAY NOT COME BACK.
YEAH.
I'M LEAVING THE COUNTRY, AFTER ALL.

MUTTER
SHU-SAKU.
HMPH
HOW UNUSUAL. HOW DO YOU SPELL IT?
"MADE IN AUTUMN."
...
C'MON, WHAT IS IT?
I'D LIKE TO AT LEAST KNOW THE NAME OF THE GUY I FELL IN LOVE WITH.
HEH HEH
WHY NOT?

WHAT A PERFECT NAME FOR A SAKE BREWER.
SAKE IS MADE IN AUTUMN, RIGHT?
SHUSAKU, WRITTEN WITH THE CHARACTERS FOR "MADE IN AUTUMN."

HARUNA-CHAN TOLD ME...
...SHE WANTS YOU TO MAKE SAKE WITH HER.
I THINK IT'S A GOOD IDEA.
SOMEDAY I'D LOVE TO SELL THE SAKE YOU MAKE.
WELL, THEN...
...GOOD-BYE.

Soon you'll be sick of me again!
HEH... I'LL BE TRAVELING BACK AND FORTH FOR A WHILE, SO I'LL SEE YOU MORE OFTEN THAN YOU THINK.
I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU'RE LEAVING TOMORROW. I'M GONNA MISS YOU!
I'LL TAKE IT! THANKS!
YOU WANT THIS, TOKUI? IT'S A GIFT CARD FOR A COFFEE SHOP.
JUNK
HEY! IS ANYONE FREE RIGHT NOW?
I NEED SOMEONE TO GO TO WAKATAKE!
HM? IT'S AT 6:00 P.M.
WHAT TIME IS YOUR FLIGHT?
I KNOW, BUT STILL ...
...BUT APPARENTLY THERE'S BEEN A FIRE AT WAKATAKE!
I HEARD THIS FROM ANOTHER COMPANY, SO I DON'T KNOW ANY DETAILS...
WHAT'S UP?

HARUNA? BUT YOU'RE LEAVING TOMOR-ROW...
BIG DEAL! I'M GOING!
I'LL CALL YOU AS SOON AS I CAN!
OKAY... Good luck!
BAM
CAN ANY OF YOU GO CHECK IT OUT?
I'LL GO!

TMP TMP TMP
HFF
HFF
There was a fire?
Where?
HFF
...
HFF
HFF

A FIRE?
WHAT THE ...?
WH...
HFF
HUH?
HFF
WHAT'RE YOU DOING HERE? LONG TIME NO SEE!
MUCCHAN?
OH!
WAS IT IN THE DISTIL-LERY?!
...
I MEAN, WE CAN'T MAKE SAKE WITHOUT RICE.
HA HA...I REALLY SHOULDN'T LAUGH ABOUT IT.
OH...
...
HEH...
WE LOST OVER HALF OUR SAKE RICE!
NO, NO! THE FIRE WAS AT THE STOREHOUSE WHERE OUR CONTRACT FARMER STORES HIS RICE!
HA HA HA!
YOU NEED RICE?
RICE...
THE RICE WE USE IS EXPENSIVE, AND NO ONE HAS MUCH OF A SURPLUS...
WE'RE TRYING TO USE OUR CONNECTIONS TO GET MORE...
...BUT IT'S SUCH SHORT NOTICE.

WHAM
ACK!
EXCUSE M–
I'LL BE IN TOUCH!
I HAVE TO RUN!!
RICE!
HUH? MUCCHAN!
PING
HEY!
I MAY BE ABLE TO GET SOME!
HUH?
SEE YOU LATER!!
...
...
I'M HERE FOR A REASON, I SWEAR!
I...I'M SORRY...
EEK
WHOA!
HUH?
WHAT THE HELL WAS THAT ABOUT?
And what does he mean by "later"?
Something's up...
BEATS ME.
THAT GUY'S AN ENIGMA.

SKREE
BEEP
GRANDPA! FUJIMURA-SAN SAYS HE CAN GET US UP TO TEN BAGS!
TEN MEASLY BAGS?
EVERY LITTLE BIT HELPS!
HUH? WHAT COULD THAT BE?
I SEE...
NO, WE'D BE THRILLED WITH ANY AMOUNT YOU CAN GIVE US!
ALL RIGHT, I'LL TALK TO YOU LATER!
MUC-CHAN!
WHAT HAPPENED? YOU JUST RAN OFF YESTERDAY, AND-
OH MY...
TA DA
SORRY TO KEEP YOU WAITING!
I BROUGHT RICE!

BRAAAG
THIS IS MY GRAND-PA'S...
...PRIZED KOSHI-HIKARI RICE FROM UONUMA!
AW SHUCKS
WOW! THIS IS AMAZING! WHERE DID YOU GET ALL THIS?!
MY GRANDPARENTS ARE RICE FARMERS. I ASKED THEM TO COLLECT ALL THE RICE THEY COULD FROM THEIR VILLAGE.
I BROUGHT AS MUCH AS I COULD FIT ON THE TRUCK, BUT THERE'S MORE WHERE THIS CAME FROM!
IT'S A MIRACLE!
VSH
...
...
...
Argh...
...
...
Grand-pa, you tell him
RIGHT?
WHAT?
THAT'S THE HIGHEST-QUALITY RICE!
BREWER'S RICE ISN'T THE SAME AS THE RICE YOU EAT.
WHAT?
RFF
...

WE MAKE OUR SAKE WITH A TYPE OF BREWER'S RICE CALLED YAMADA NISHIKI.
CRUNCH
YOU CAN'T USE KOSHI-HIKARI RICE TO MAKE SAKE.
HUH?
YAMADA NISHIKI?
I've heard of that...
BREW-ER'S RICE?
YOU MEAN ...
My brother's so brave!
...I WENT TO ALL THAT TROUBLE FOR NOTHING?
PRETTY MUCH.
HA!
HA HA HA!
It's okay!
CRAP!
I'M SUCH AN IDIOT! I'M SO EMBAR-RASSED!!
IT'S OKAY, MUCCHAN! YOUR HEART WAS IN THE RIGHT PLACE! THANK YOU!
ARGH!!
I HATE MY-SELF...
I fail at being an adult...
OH GOD...
HA...
BWA HA HA HA!
HA HA HA!

...
Grandpa's... laughing.
THUMP
THUMP
Ha ha ha
HA HA HA HA! KOSHIHIKARI RICE! THAT'S HILARIOUS!
...?
I... I'M SO... ... SORRY ...
YOU REALLY DON'T KNOW THE FIRST THING ABOUT SAKE, DO YOU, BOY?
WHAT A BUFFOON!
YEP! WE FOUND SOME RICE THAT WAS SUPPOSED TO GO TO A BREWERY THAT WENT UNDER THIS SPRING.
IS THAT SO?
IT LOOKS LIKE I'LL BE ABLE TO GET YOU THAT RICE!
REALLY?
SIR!
HEY, WAKATAKE-SAN!
THIS YEAR I WANT YOU TO MAKE THAT SAKE YOU'VE BEEN TALKING ABOUT.
WHAT?
That's great!
Yay!
HAR-UNA!
YEAH?
OF COURSE, IT'S NOT ALL YAMADA NISHIKI.
IT'S DIFFERENT VARIETIES OF BREWER'S RICE...
NO PROB-LEM.

WE CAN'T GET THE RICE WE USUALLY USE...
...SO IT'S A GOOD TIME TO EXPERIMENT.
DON'T WORRY IF IT DOESN'T COME OUT.
YOU MAKE YOUR SAKE.
O... OKAY!
I'LL DO MY BEST!
THAT'S GREAT, HARUNA-CHAN!
AND THE SAKE HARUNA MAKES...
YOU! OTHER HARUNA!
HUH?
I WANT YOU TO SELL IT.
WE'LL GIVE YOU ALL YOU WANT.
I'D SAY YOU'VE EARNED IT.
IT WON'T BE OUR USUAL SAKE, BUT I KNOW IT'LL BE DELICIOUS!
After all, it's Wakatake!
KYAA KYAA
YOU DID IT, MUCCHAN!
All right!
SLAP

HEY, MUC-CHAN ...
ABOUT THE RICE...
GO AHEAD AND KEEP IT.
KyAa KyAa
OH, THANK YOU! ☆
WE CAN GIVE IT OUT TO EVERYONE WE'VE INCONVENIENCED WITH ALL THIS.
More rice... ♡
CREAK
LOOK...
...I KNOW I PROMISED TO STEER CLEAR OF YOU...
HUH?
THANKS.
YOU DID GOOD.

SORRY...
...YOU WENT THROUGH ALL THAT TROUBLE FOR NOTHING.
OH... THAT'S OKAY.
IT'S MY OWN FAULT. I HAD NO IDEA WHAT I WAS DOING. I JUST JUMPED IN AND SCREWED THINGS UP EVEN MORE.
I'm a total failure as a salesman.
It's so pretty!
This is good rice!
I WOULDN'T SAY THAT.
MY GRANDFATHER AND HARUNA LOOK PRETTY HAPPY.
YEAH, BUT...

I'VE NEVER SEEN THE OLD MAN LAUGH LIKE THAT BEFORE.
HEH
YOU REALLY ARE SOMETHING.
ACTUALLY, I DON'T KNOW HOW TO THANK YOU...
HE SMILED!

YOU COULD ALWAYS THANK ME WITH YOUR BODY!
HEH HEH!
Just kidding!
...
...
I'M JOKING...
Ha ha...
OBVIOUSLY.
HA HA...
...

YEAH.
ALL JOKING ASIDE, THERE IS SOMETHING YOU CAN DO.
I WANT YOU TO MAKE THAT SAKE.
HELP HARUNA MAKE THE SAKE SHE'S BEEN TALKING ABOUT.
I'D LOVE TO BE ABLE TO CARRY SAKE THAT THE TWO OF YOU MADE TOGETHER!
Come on!
ALSO, I WANT A HUG!
!!
...
I'LL THINK ABOUT IT.
...
YOU JUST DON'T GIVE UP, DO YOU?
...

Yahoo!
WHAM
!!
♡
SIGH
...
C'MERE.

...
Ahh...

PAT
PAT

IT'S THE BEST GOODBYE PRESENT EVER.
NO, THIS IS WAY MORE THAN I'D HOPED FOR!
DOESN'T TAKE MUCH, DOES IT?
NOW I'M HAPPY!

DON'T PUSH YOUR LUCK!
HA HA!
GRAB
ARE YOU PUCKER-ING UP?
YOU THOUGHT MAYBE WHAT?
WELL...I THOUGHT MAYBE...
I COULD GET A KISS? Heh heh...
?!

GTP
Damn...
AWWW...
...
THAT'S ENOUGH. GET GOING.
DON'T YOU HAVE WORK?
MMM...
DON'T MAKE SUCH FILTHY NOISES.
BUT I...
MMM...
OH NO!
NEW YORK! I'M LEAVING TODAY!
OH, UH...IT'S ALMOST NOON.
CRAP! I NEVER PACKED!
WHAT TIME IS IT?
WHAT TIME IS IT NOW?
I JUST NEED TO GET HOME AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE!
My passport!
SURE THING.
SHF SHF
CALM DOWN.
WAIT OUTSIDE AND I'LL BRING THE CAR AROUND.
REALLY? YOU'RE A LIFE-SAVER!
...
GYAAH!!
ARGH ARGH
OH NO! WHAT DO I DO?
WHAT THE HELL AM I DOING HERE?
HUH?
ARGH ARGH

OH!
ONE MORE THING!
WHAT? WHAT MORE COULD THERE POSSIBLY BE?
AREN'T YOU IN A HURRY?
IS IT OKAY...
...IF I COME BACK TO JAPAN SOMEDAY?
AND HANDLE THE WAKATAKE ACCOUNT AGAIN?
I DON'T CARE.
DO WHAT YOU WANT.

WHAT?!
MUCCHAN'S GONE?
HE'S LEAVING THE COUNTRY RIGHT NOW?
IF HE DIDN'T MISS HIS FLIGHT.
BUT HE SAID HE MIGHT NOT COME BACK!
WE DIDN'T EVEN GET TO SAY GOODBYE! ISN'T THAT A SHAME, GRANDPA?
HRMPH...
HE'LL BE BACK.
ARE YOU SURE?
HOW SHOULD I KNOW?
COME ON
Help me carry that rice.
WELL, IF HE IS COMING BACK, I HAVE TO WORK HARD TO MAKE A REALLY DELICIOUS SAKE FOR HIM!
WHY? HE CAN'T DRINK IT.
THAT'S NOT WHAT I MEANT...
HRMPH
FWP

Not sure I like this layout...
UH-HUH...
HEY, EVERYONE! I'M BACK!
CHOK CHOK
LONG TIME NO SEE, GUYS!
POING
HARUNA!
You cut your hair!
I'M HOME!
WELCOME BACK, HARUNA-KUN!
WHEN DID YOU GET IN? I THOUGHT YOU WEREN'T STARTING WORK UNTIL NEXT WEEK.
THAT'S RIGHT. I JUST THOUGHT I'D JUST POP IN AND SAY HI.
WOW, THE LAST YEAR AND A HALF FELT LIKE FOREVER.
Here, I brought souvenirs!
BUT NONE OF YOU HAVE CHANGED AT ALL.
IT'S STILL THE SAME OLD CREW!
Yaay!
OH YEAH?
BUT WHO'S THAT?
BIP BIP

HE'S NEW, ISN'T HE?
OH, THAT'S THE SYSTEMS ENGINEER WE SUBCON-TRACTED.
WHAT?
A NEW GUY? WHAT HAPPENED TO NAKA... THE OLD GUY?
WHO? OH, HIM! I DUNNO, MAYBE HE GOT REASSIGNED...
EXCUSE ME...

WHERE'S HARUNA-KUN?
HUH?
I made him tea.
I DON'T KNOW. HE JUST RUSHED OUT.
...
RUNNING AROUND IN A PANIC...
Yup.
...SAME AS EVER.

"Nakagawa?"

"He quit about a year ago, I think."
"I don't know the details..."
"...but I think he left to help out at the family business."
HFF
HFF
I'VE MISSED THIS PLACE.
OKAY, I'M HERE. NOW WHAT?

VOLUME ONE/END

The Scent of Apple Blossoms

The Scent of Apple Blossoms

The Scent of Apple Blossoms
Side Story

It is dawn in spring.

That's from an old poem.

If you share a passionate kiss, that means something, right?
Anyway.
What's the definition of "dating"?
HELLO!
Personally, I think it does.

The Scent of Apple Blossoms Side Story

AFTER YOU LEFT YESTERDAY, ANOTHER GUY FROM YOUR OFFICE CAME BY.
HE WAS PRETTY SURPRISED TO HEAR YOU'D BEEN HERE.
...
HA HA...
HFF
YOU'RE BACK AGAIN?
YOU CAME YESTERDAY TOO. DO YOU REALLY HAVE TO STOP BY EVERY SINGLE DAY?
What's the point?
CHECKING IN WITH THE CLIENT IS ONE OF THE FUNDAMENTALS OF SALES!
Like I need a point!
IS THAT SO?
I JUST POP IN TO SAY HI ON THE WAY TO MY OTHER CUSTOMERS.
HE'S AS COLD AS EVER. WHAT'S WRONG WITH WANTING TO SEE HIM EVERY DAY?
DAMMIT, WE'RE RIGHT BACK WHERE WE WERE BEFORE.
ARE WE NOT REALLY AN ITEM?
MAYBE IT TAKES MORE THAN A KISS... BUT THAT KISS WAS PRETTY INTENSE...
HEY!
KEEP YOUR THOUGHTS TO YOURSELF!!
WHAT?!
Did I say that out loud? No way!

DUH!!
I MEAN...
I WANT YOU TO LIKE ME... Okay?
IT'S NOT LIKE I HATE YOU.
WHAT?
I WANT YOU TO GO OUT WITH ME!
SHF SHF
JEEZ ...
WHAT EXACTLY DO YOU WANT FROM ME?
YOU'RE SO PUSHY!
...
HEY... DO YOU MEAN...
Does that mean ...?
I'M NOT GONNA SAY IT AGAIN.
I ALREADY SAID I DON'T HATE YOU!
THAT'S NOT WHAT I MEAN.
I WANT...
HEY.

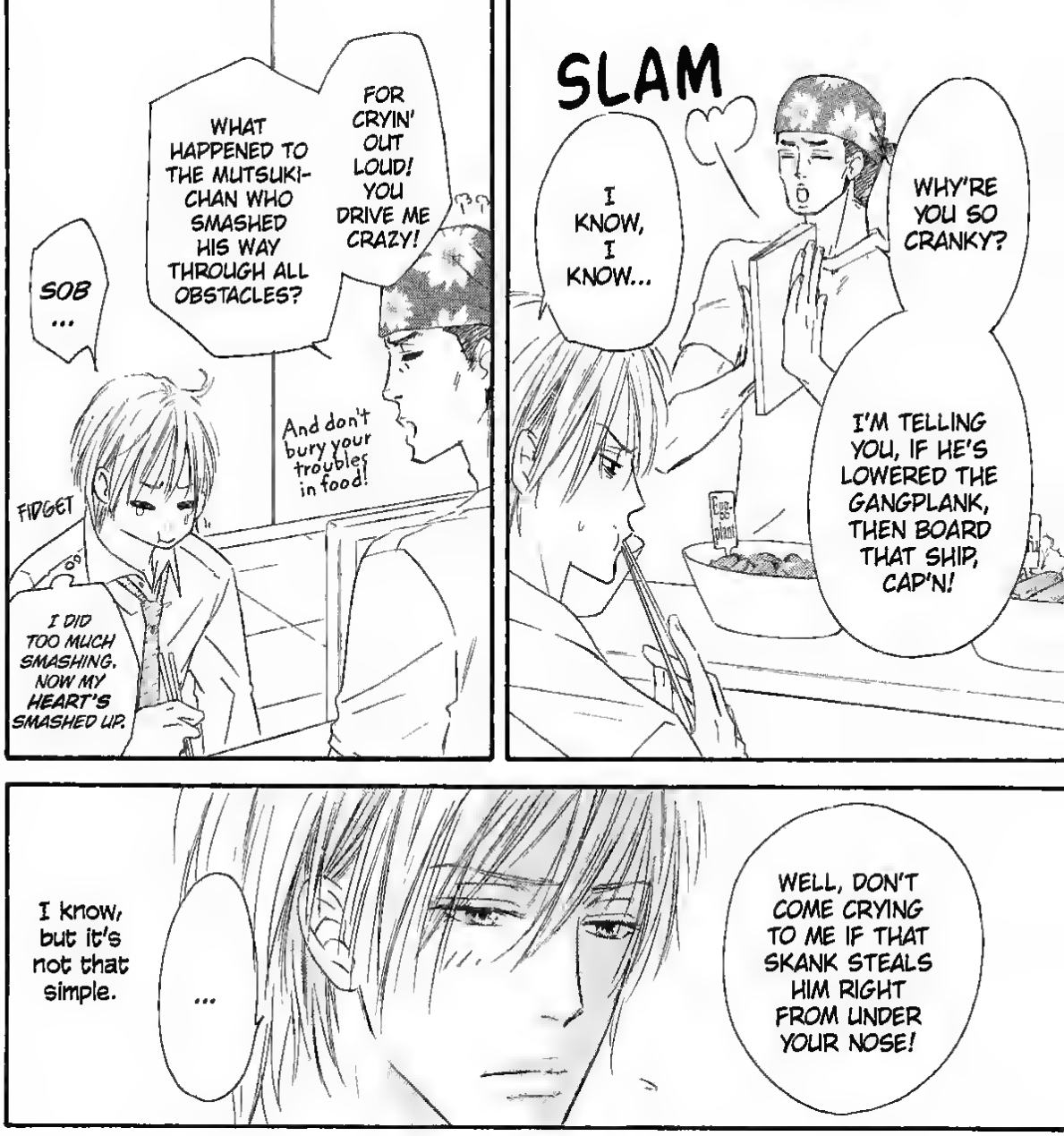
DO WHATEVER YOU WANT.
THANKS. I will.
WHAT'RE YOU DOING? LOOK WHERE WE ARE!
...
IF YOU'RE GOING TO BE VAGUE, I GET TO INTERPRET IT ANY WAY I WANT.
A LITTLE ONE?
...mm.
JUST A LITTLE KISS...
HEY!
COME ON...
I'M SORRY THERE ISN'T MORE TO SEE!
IT'S A LOT MORE INTERESTING WHEN WE'RE BREWING.
THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR SHOWING ME AROUND THE DISTILLERY.
HEY.
ENOUGH ALREADY ...
OW!
BONK
!!

That jerk hit me!
HELLO!
I DIDN'T KNOW YOU WERE HERE!
OH, MUCCHAN!
PLEASE DO!
COULD I COME SEE IT DURING BREWING SEASON?
WHAT A CHARMING STORY!
SHE JUST TOLD ME ALL ABOUT THE RICE.
BDMP
Right, Mucchan?
HUH? ME?!
What?
HARUNA-SAN!
SAEKI-SAN, THIS IS THE MAN WHO INSPIRED THE CREATION OF THE NEW SAKE I WAS TELLING YOU ABOUT!
These two are so noisy together!
NO WAY!
I'm going to keep the legend alive!
JUST FORGET IT EVER HAPPENED!
The shame...
DON'T TELL PEOPLE ABOUT THAT!
THE LEGEND OF THE KOSHI-HIKARI? OF COURSE I DID!
WAIT, YOU TOLD HER...
INTER-VIEW YOU? WOW!
She writes for the lifestyle section of a fashion magazine.
SAEKI-SAN IS A JOURNALIST. SHE'S HERE TO INTERVIEW ME ABOUT OUR SAKE!

EXCUSE ME.
HARUNA-SAN, COULD I TAKE YOUR PHOTOGRAPH IN FRONT OF THE BREWERY?
WHAT? ME?
I'M NOT EVEN WEARING ANY MAKEUP!
PLEASE! WE NEED A SHOT OF WAKATAKE'S ADORABLE BREWERY MANAGER!
GO FOR IT, HARUNA-CHAN! DON'T PASS THIS CHANCE UP!
REALLY? SHOULD I?
I'LL PASS.
DON'T BE LIKE THAT. THE PHOTO WILL BE SO MUCH BETTER WITH MORE THAN JUST ME.
GET GRAMPS TO POSE FOR YOU.
WHY DON'T WE HAVE HER TAKE ONE OF ALL THREE OF US?
AND...
HEH
...I'D LOVE TO GET YOUR *BROTHER* IN THE SHOT TOO.

IT'S SO WONDERFUL THAT YOU AND YOUR BROTHER ARE WORKING WITH YOUR GRANDFATHER TO PRESERVE THIS BREWERY. I'D LOVE TO GET A FAMILY PHOTO!
AND IT DOESN'T HURT THAT YOU TWO ARE SO GORGEOUS! I'M SURE YOU'LL BE A HOT TOPIC!
OH, SAEKI-SAN! YOU'RE TOO MUCH!
C'MON, SHUSAKU, JUST THINK OF IT AS FREE ADVERTISING. GO GET GRANDPA!
...
SHU-SAKU!
How do I put this?
As a man in love...
Your brother's so handsome. Is he married?
No, he's... difficult. I don't even think he has a girlfriend!
JING
GRANDPA'S IN THE WARE-HOUSE.
FINE.
Jeez...
CLICK

FLIP
JUST DO HIM ALREADY!
...I'm getting danger signals from her.
FOR THE LOVE OF SAKE
I MEAN, LOOK AT THIS ARTICLE!
IF YOU'RE WORRIED ABOUT THE COMPETITION, YOU NEED TO SEAL THE DEAL FAST!
CRUDE? I'M SERIOUS.
OH, COME ON.
KOCHAN, YOU'RE SO CRUDE...
MUNCH MUNCH
SHUT UP, KOCHAN.
"LOOKING AT SAKE FROM A WOMAN'S PERSPECTIVE"? YEAH, RIGHT.
I DON'T THINK IT'S THE SAKE SHE'S LOOKING AT.
Yow!
"WAKATAKE'S COOL, HANDSOME BREWER."
IT'S NOTHING BUT PICTURES OF HIM!
WHAT EXACTLY IS THE FOCUS OF THIS ARTICLE?


SOB ...
WHAT HAPPENED TO THE MUTSUKI-CHAN WHO SMASHED HIS WAY THROUGH ALL OBSTACLES?
FOR CRYIN' OUT LOUD! YOU DRIVE ME CRAZY!
And don't bury your troubles in food!
FIDGET
I DID TOO MUCH SMASHING. NOW MY HEART'S SMASHED UP.
SLAM
I KNOW, I KNOW...
WHY'RE YOU SO CRANKY?
I'M TELLING YOU, IF HE'S LOWERED THE GANGPLANK, THEN BOARD THAT SHIP, CAP'N!

I know, but it's not that simple.
...
WELL, DON'T COME CRYING TO ME IF THAT SKANK STEALS HIM RIGHT FROM UNDER YOUR NOSE!

How do I handle a man like him?

TUP
SIGH
Not gonna bother.
ARE WE EVEN DATING? WELL?
!!
Not even a snarky remark!
...
HARUNA-CHAN TOLD ME YOU WERE IN THE WARE-HOUSE...
ER... HELLO THERE!
...
DAMMIT, SHE ALWAYS HANDS THE BORING STUFF OVER TO ME...
GRR
SIXTY BOTTLES A YEAR? NO WAY. WE CAN'T GIVE YOU THAT MANY. WE COULD MAYBE DO TWENTY.
HARUNA'S IN, ISN'T SHE? GO TALK TO HER.
I'm always on business, but still...
I REALLY AM HERE ON BUSINESS TODAY.
Here's the proposal.
I WANTED TO TALK TO YOU ABOUT SERVING YOUR SAKE IN OUR NEW YORK RESTAU-RANT.
SHE ALREADY GAVE ME THE GO-AHEAD. BUT SHE SAID TO ASK YOU ABOUT THE QUANTITY.
TWENTY-FIVE BOTTLES A YEAR? OOH, I CAN'T AGREE TO THAT! FORTY!
THIRTY-SIX!
THIRTY-NINE!
YOU WENT UP AGAIN!
ARE YOU JUST PICKING RANDOM NUMBERS NOW?
I GIVE UP. OKAY, 25.
COME ON...
Be quiet...I'm trying to calculate
SHF SHF
FLIP
NOT GONNA HAPPEN.
WHAT? TWENTY BOTTLES A YEAR?
YOU ONLY WENT DOWN ONE BOTTLE!
THEN... THIRTY... NINE!
THAT'S NOT NEARLY ENOUGH! FORTY AT LEAST!

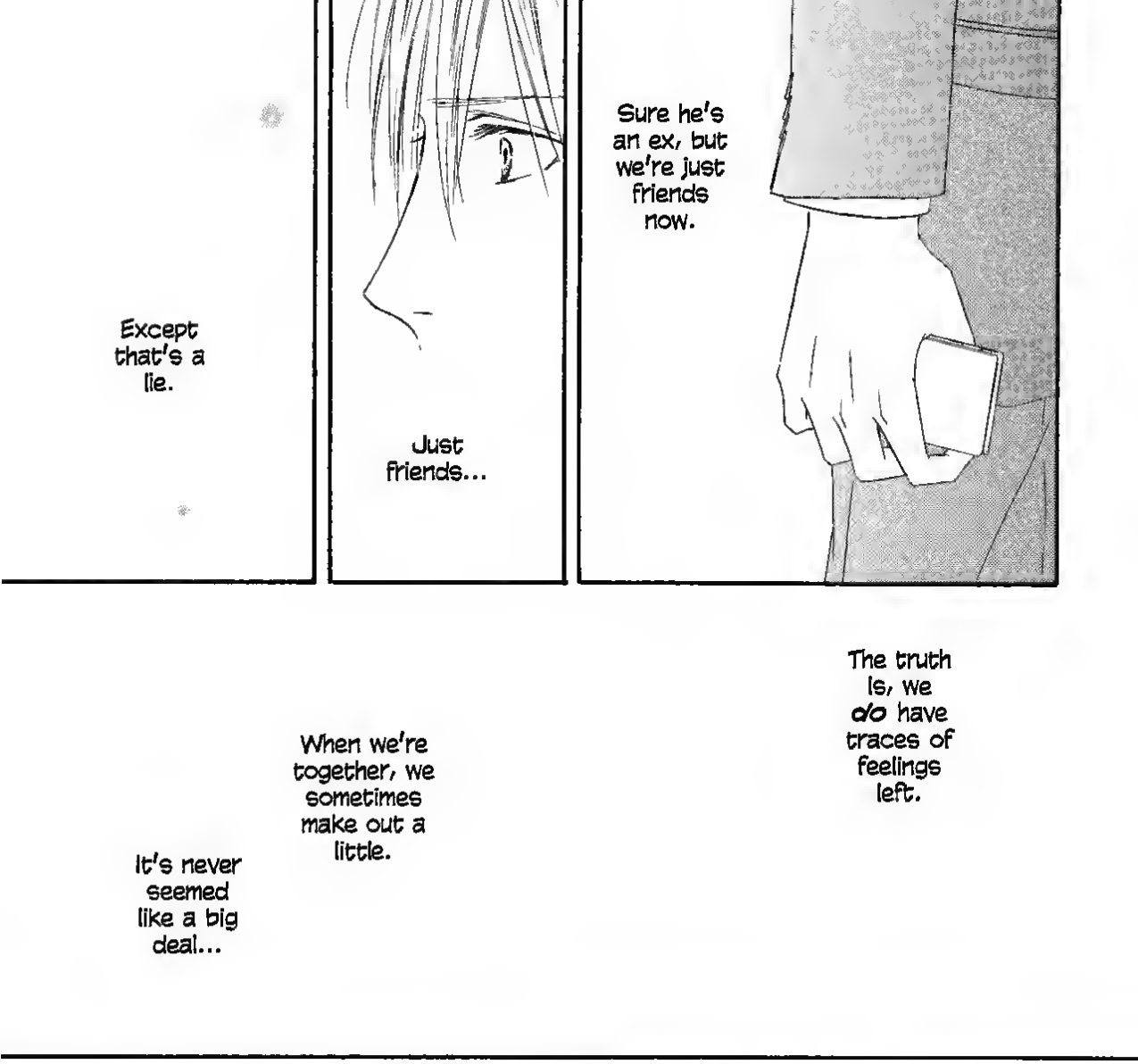
If I go below forty, I'll be in big trouble! I'm not kidding!
ISN'T THERE ANYTHING YOU CAN DO?
A tearful plea.
I KNOW I'M ASKING A LOT...
Pleeeease!
...
CLUTCH
JEEZ, OKAY!
All right!
BUT IT'S NOT SET IN STONE.
I CAN'T MAKE ANY PROMISES, OKAY?
YAY!
O...
OKAY!
THEN I'LL COME BY TOMORROW WITH A CONTRACT FOR FORTY BOTTLES.
YOU'RE PUSHING YOUR LUCK.
I KNOW... But how many?
New York By
IT'S FINE.
JUST PUT DOWN ANY NUMBER YOU WANT.
I'LL MAKE IT WORK.
OH...
THANK YOU...
...SO MUCH.

HEY, NOT THIS AGAIN ...
WHAT IF SOMEONE COMES IN?
YEAH, I KNOW. JUST GIVE ME A MINUTE HERE.
ISH
HEY...
...
WHAT NOW? NO MORE FAVORS!
...
COME TO MY PLACE ON THE NEXT DAY OFF AND...
I'M TIRED OF ALL THIS AMBIGUITY.
I WANT SOMETHING REAL.
RING

What is it, Jess?
PSST PSST
COME ON, MUTSUKI, THAT'S THE FIRST THING YOU SAY TO ME? THAT'S COLD, MAN! HOW ARE YOU?
I'm fine. Seriously, what's up? it's really early in the morning over there, isn't it?
RING
RING
HUH?
Jess? Why's he calling?
UH... SORRY, IT'S A FRIEND FROM THE U.S.
RING
ACK... SORRY.
WHAT A TIME FOR MY PHONE TO GO OFF...
I REALLY DO WANT TO SEE YOU. YOU LEFT FOR JAPAN SO SUDDENLY. I'VE BEEN LONELY!
Yeah...
CHING
SHOULD I BE HAVING THIS CONVER-SATION IN FRONT OF HIM?
ACTUALLY, I'M TRAVELING. I'M IN HONG KONG RIGHT NOW. I THOUGHT I'D STOP BY JAPAN AND SEE YOU.
LET ME STAY AT YOUR PLACE FOR A COUPLE OF DAYS.
You're just after a place to crash, aren't you?
DON'T BE LIKE THAT.
HEY, YOU'RE BEING PRETTY CAGEY. THAT'S NOT LIKE YOU.
...
When do you want to stay at my place? I'm kind of busy...
I GUESS I'M SAFE. WE'RE SPEAKING ENGLISH.

A GUY YOU LIKE? IS HE SO SMALL-MINDED HE'D GET JEALOUS OVER YOUR EX?
There's this guy I like...
...and I don't want him to get the wrong idea if I let an ex stay with me.
It's not like that...
...
PIP
SO? THINK YOU'RE GONNA LAND HIM? Ha ha ha!
Leave me alone!
Look, I'll call you later.
I'm with someone right now...
AHA! YOU'RE WITH HIM, AREN'T YOU?
I see, I see...
NA... NAKAGAWA-SAN?
He's up there!
WE NEED TO FINISH OUR CONVER-SATION!
...I... HUH?
SORRY ABOUT THAT.
A FRIEND WANTS TO VISIT, AND...

HUH?
...WHAT?
HUH?
IF HE'S COMING TO JAPAN, JUST LET HIM STAY WITH YOU.
I DON'T WANT YOU TO LOSE FRIENDS OVER ME.
DON'T COME BY TOMORROW UNLESS IT'S FOR BUSINESS.
I DON'T HAVE TIME TO ENTERTAIN YOU EVERY DAY.
YOU SPEAK ENGLISH?
IS THAT A PROBLEM?
What's going on here?
...


Except that's a lie.
Just friends...
Sure he's an ex, but we're just friends now.
The truth is, we do have traces of feelings left.
When we're together, we sometimes make out a little.
It's never seemed like a big deal...

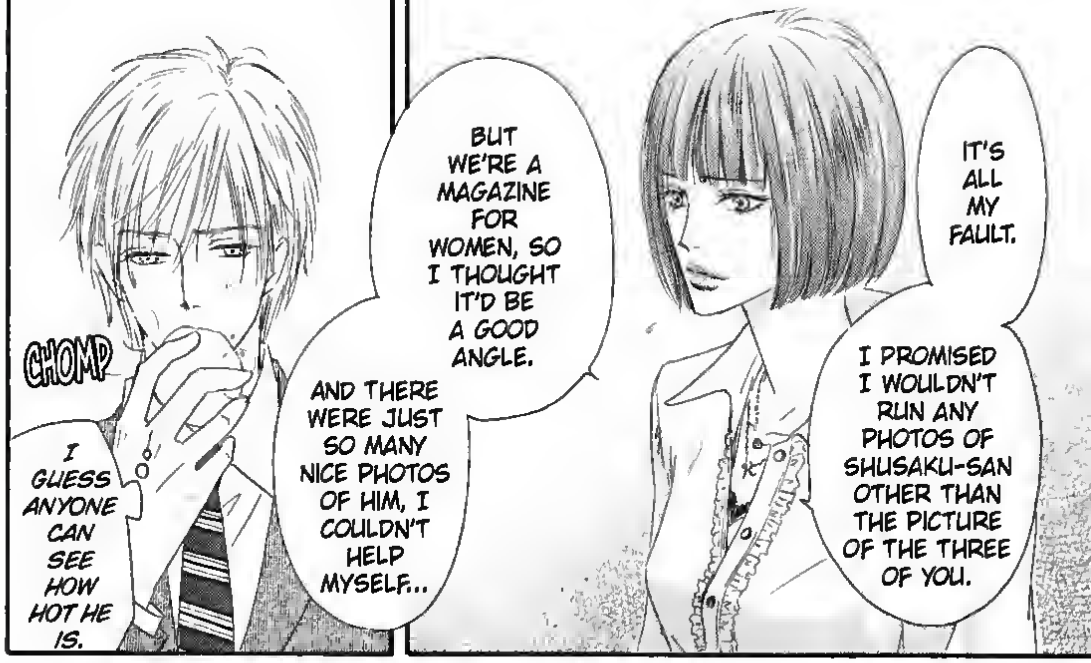
YEAH ...
I CAN'T BELIEVE THEY WENT FOR IT! NICE WORK!
UH-HUH...
I HEARD YOU GOT ANOTHER SIXTY BOTTLES FROM WAKATAKE.
HEY, HARUNA.
TENKOU
SHUNKA

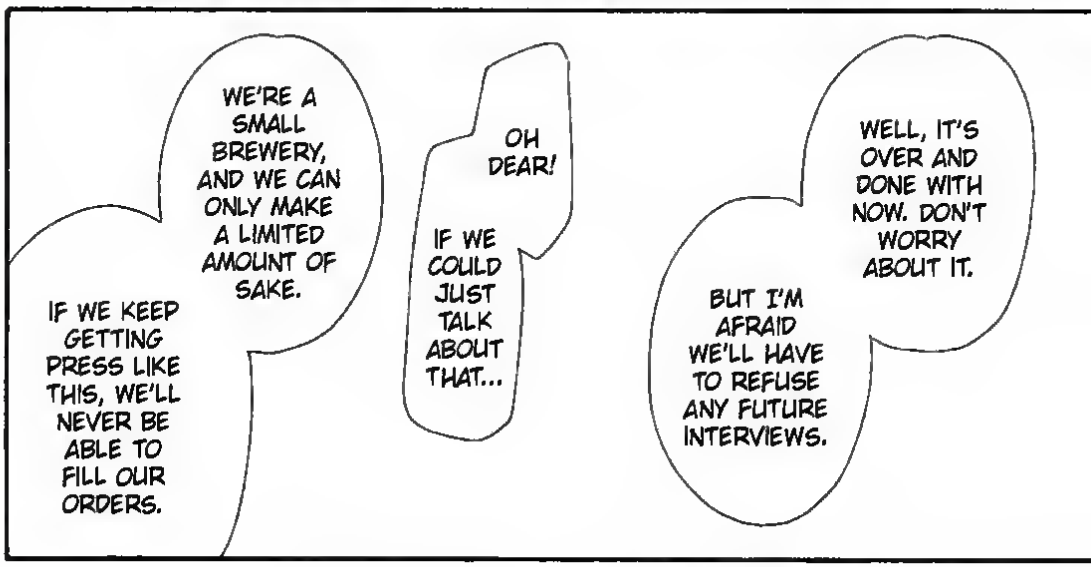
Him and his mood swings.
I DUNNO ...
I WAS JUST THINKING BACK ON MY LIFE AND FEELING KIND OF DEPRESSED.
WHAT'S UP? WHAT'RE YOU DOWN ABOUT?
YOUR LIFE? WHAT THE HELL FOR? THINGS SEEM TO BE GOING PRETTY WELL FOR YOU.
IT'S NOT ABOUT WORK.
I WAS WONDERING IF I COME OFF AS IRRESPONSIBLE.
Here's that data. It's all yours.
Oh, thanks.
REALLY? I DON'T KNOW WHAT OTHER PEOPLE HAVE TOLD YOU...
...BUT I GUESS YOU CAN BE A LITTLE... UNINHIBITED SOMETIMES.
I DON'T THINK I'M LIKE THAT.
YOU JUST HAVE TO REALIZE THAT SOME PEOPLE ARE TOO STRAITLACED TO HANDLE YOU.
I KNOW, BUT...
But I want to get in deep...
...with him.
...
PAT PAT
YOU'LL NEVER GET ALONG WITH PEOPLE LIKE THAT, SO JUST TRY NOT TO GET IN TOO DEEP WITH THEM.
Don't let it bother you. I like that side of you a lot.

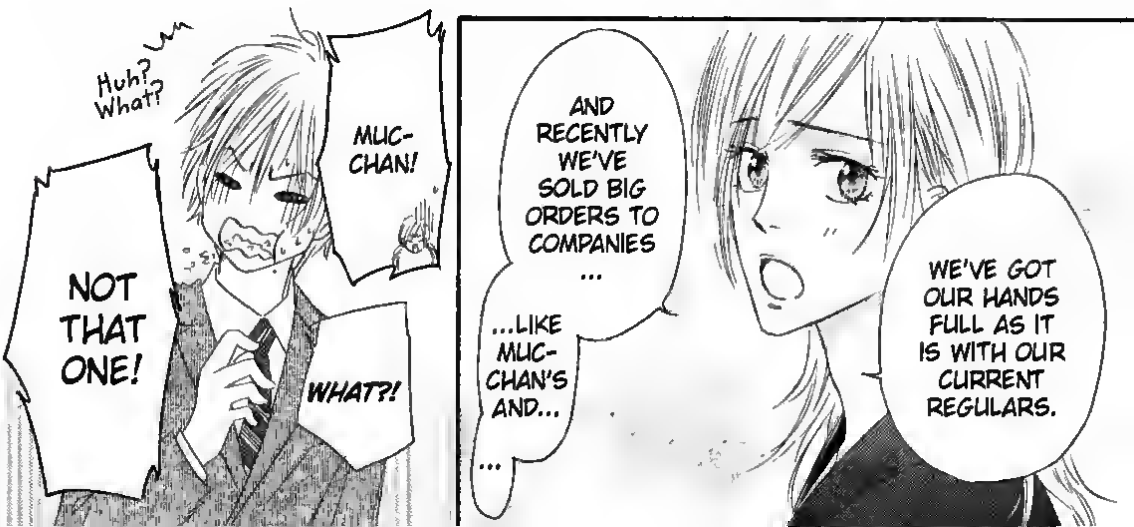
HELLO THERE!
WEL-COME!
I BROUGHT THE CONTRACT TODAY. COULD YOU LOOK IT OVER?
OH, FOR THE NEW YORK STORE, RIGHT?
RIGHT.
I SENT YOU TO TALK TO MY BROTHER BECAUSE I WAS AFRAID I WOULDN'T BE ABLE TO SAY NO TO YOU...
...BUT I GUESS HE COULDN'T EITHER!
WOW, I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU GOT MY BROTHER TO AGREE TO SIXTY BOTTLES.
We have a pretty small capacity.
I THOUGHT THIRTY WOULD BE AS HIGH AS WE COULD GO.
Ha ha...
I BEGGED AND PLEADED.
YOU'RE REALLY SOMETHING, MUCCHAN!
HEY, I'M STEAMING SOME MANJU RIGHT NOW. DO YOU WANT ONE?
NOT IF THEY'VE GOT SAKE IN THEM.
HA HA HA! YOU'LL BE ALL RIGHT!
IT'S A NEW RECIPE. EVEN A CHILD COULD EAT THESE. TRY ONE!

BOW
Oh.
I'M MEETING WITH SOMEONE ELSE RIGHT NOW...
...BUT YOU'VE MET HER BEFORE. YOU DON'T MIND, RIGHT?
HUH?
WHAT DID YOU THINK? I MENTIONED YOU.
OH...YES, EVERYONE TEASED ME ABOUT THAT.
DID YOU SEE THE ARTICLE?
YES, I READ IT.
I'll join you.
HELLO.
UH, SAEKI-SAN, WASN'T IT? YOU'RE THE WRITER.
WERE YOU?
I'M SORRY. BUT IT WAS SUCH A CUTE STORY.
Hee hee...
I GOT A REALLY GOOD RESPONSE TO THAT ARTICLE, SO I WAS THINKING OF DOING ANOTHER INTERVIEW!

OH MY, THEY LOOK DELICIOUS! ♡
DON'T MIND IF I DO...
GO AHEAD!
THE ONES WITH THE MARK ARE NONALCOHOLIC.
The ones without it are for adults!
THANKS!
HOO
HOO
HERE WE ARE! SORRY TO KEEP YOU WAITING!
FRESHLY STEAMED SAKAMANJU! ENJOY!
WHERE'S SHUSAKU-SAN TODAY?
ERK
THEY'RE ON A FIRST-NAME BASIS?
SO, HARUNA-SAN...
HMM?
BE CAREFUL... THEY'RE REALLY HOT.
WHY? DID THE ARTICLE UPSET HIM?
OH...I'M NOT SO SURE HE'D GO FOR THAT.
CLINK
Here you go.
Ha ha ha... A LITTLE.
I WANTED TO TALK TO HIM ABOUT MY NEXT INTERVIEW.
HE'S IN THE BACK.


IT'S ALL MY FAULT.
I PROMISED I WOULDN'T RUN ANY PHOTOS OF SHUSAKU-SAN OTHER THAN THE PICTURE OF THE THREE OF YOU.
BUT WE'RE A MAGAZINE FOR WOMEN, SO I THOUGHT IT'D BE A GOOD ANGLE.
AND THERE WERE JUST SO MANY NICE PHOTOS OF HIM, I COULDN'T HELP MYSELF...
CHOMP
I GUESS ANYONE CAN SEE HOW HOT HE IS.


WELL, IT'S OVER AND DONE WITH NOW. DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT.
BUT I'M AFRAID WE'LL HAVE TO REFUSE ANY FUTURE INTERVIEWS.
OH DEAR!
IF WE COULD JUST TALK ABOUT THAT...
WE'RE A SMALL BREWERY, AND WE CAN ONLY MAKE A LIMITED AMOUNT OF SAKE.
IF WE KEEP GETTING PRESS LIKE THIS, WE'LL NEVER BE ABLE TO FILL OUR ORDERS.


WE'VE GOT OUR HANDS FULL AS IT IS WITH OUR CURRENT REGULARS.
AND RECENTLY WE'VE SOLD BIG ORDERS TO COMPANIES ...
...LIKE MUC-CHAN'S AND...
...
MUC-CHAN!
WHAT?!
NOT THAT ONE!
Huh? What?

THOSE ARE THE ADULT SAKAMANJU!
I TOLD YOU, THE SAFE ONES ARE MARKED!
Huh?
Marked? What?
!!
OH NO! YOU NEARLY ATE THE WHOLE THING!
Not again...
SHU-SAKU!
MUCCHAN ATE ONE OF THE REGULAR SAKAMANJU!
What should we do?
?
FWAP
WHAT'S ALL THE HOLLERING ABOUT?
I HEARD YOU THE FIRST TIME!
SHING
HARUNA-CHAN...
...I THINK I'LL BE OKAY.
Last time I ate two!
NO YOU WON'T!
THESE ARE STRONGER THAN THE LAST BATCH!
They've got more sake lees!
HEY, SHUSAKU!
They're even STRONGER?
Oh, yeah, uh...
...I can handle alcohol
Um... are you all right?

ER...
I...
SIGH
JEEZ ...
IT'S ALWAYS ABOUT YOU, ISN'T IT?
HEY THERE.
ABOUT THE OTHER DAY...
!!
SNIFF
WAAH
GRAB
ARE YOU DRUNK ALREADY?
YOU SHOULD DONATE YOUR BODY TO SCIENCE...
SHOF
SHOF
UM...
ABOUT THE OTHER DAY...
UMM
QUIET, YOU LUSH.

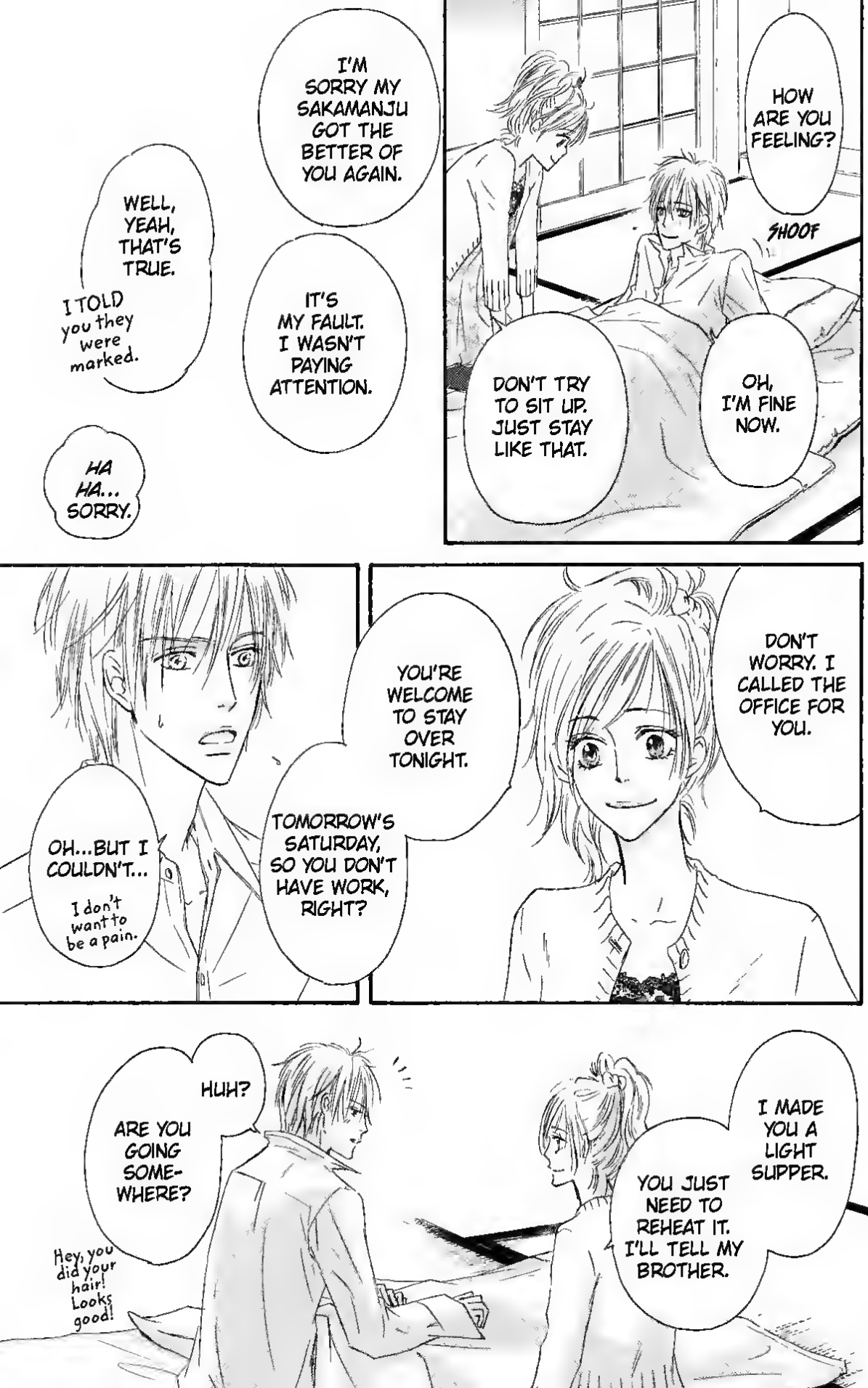
EXCUSE ME!
SHUSAKU-SAN!
I HOPE YOU'LL FORGIVE ME FOR THE OTHER DAY.
I PROMISE IT'LL NEVER HAPPEN AGAIN.
!!
...
TCH.
DRAG DRAG
Come on, just put one foot in front of the other!
W-wait! I'm d-dizzy...
I'M GONNA PUT HIM TO BED.
HARUNA, YOU CALL HIS OFFICE.
OKAY.
Oh, Muc-chan...

GLOOM
HE SEEMS ...
...QUITE ANGRY INDEED.
YEAH, BUT HE'S KIND OF LIKE THAT ALL THE TIME.
Don't let it get to you.
HE REALLY IS UPSET, THOUGH. I'M SORRY, BUT I DON'T THINK YOU'LL GET ANOTHER INTERVIEW.
ALL RIGHT...

IT'S OKAY. I'M USED TO IT.
HEY! DRINK SOME WATER BEFORE YOU PASS OUT!
I'M SORRY ...
HOW DID THIS HAPPEN AGAIN?
WAAH
Oh boy... gravity and I are NOT friends...
OH... OKAY.
ERG...
UGH...
OH...
THANKS.
HERE.
...
GRP

HEY...
SO... ER...
ABOUT THAT PHONE CALL THE OTHER DAY...
IT REALLY WASN'T ANYTHING WEIRD...
I'M NOT GOING TO LISTEN TO YOUR DRUNKEN RAMBLING.
...
OKAY...
HAD ENOUGH?
YEAH...
YOU CAN TELL ME LATER.
NOW, YOU NEED TO SLEEP.
OKAY...

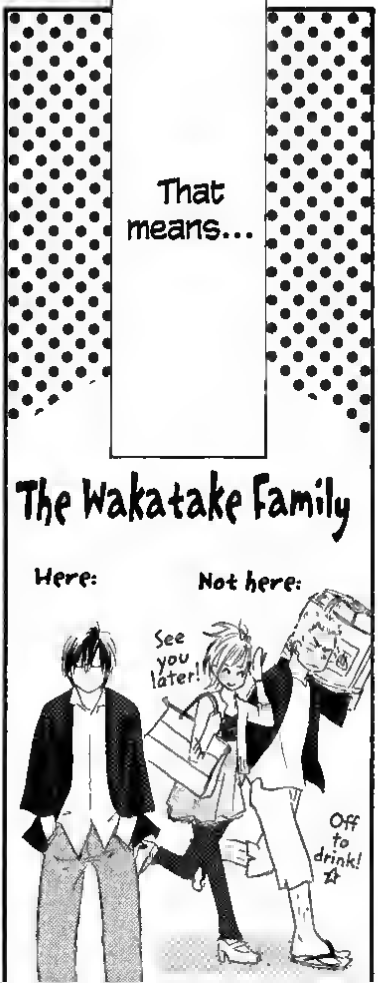
SIGH
I wonder what time it is.. It's already dark out.
Oh, that's right. I'm still here.
THUP
HARUNA? ARE YOU UP?
OKAY IF I COME IN?
TMP
TMP
TMP
FLIP
ONCE AGAIN I EMBARRASSED MYSELF ...
...IN FRONT OF THE MAN I LOVE.
FLIP
SNIFF
TALK ABOUT PATHETIC.
WHAT HAS MY LIFE COME TO?


I'M SORRY MY SAKAMANJU GOT THE BETTER OF YOU AGAIN.
WELL, YEAH, THAT'S TRUE.
I TOLD you they were marked.
IT'S MY FAULT. I WASN'T PAYING ATTENTION.
HA HA... SORRY.
HOW ARE YOU FEELING?
SHOOF
DON'T TRY TO SIT UP. JUST STAY LIKE THAT.
OH, I'M FINE NOW.
YOU'RE WELCOME TO STAY OVER TONIGHT.
TOMORROW'S SATURDAY, SO YOU DON'T HAVE WORK, RIGHT?
OH...BUT I COULDN'T...
I don't want to be a pain.
DON'T WORRY. I CALLED THE OFFICE FOR YOU.
HUH?
ARE YOU GOING SOME-WHERE?
Hey, you did your hair! Looks good!
I MADE YOU A LIGHT SUPPER.
YOU JUST NEED TO REHEAT IT. I'LL TELL MY BROTHER.

Huh? But that means...
OH... WELL, TAKE CARE...
I'LL BE BACK TOMORROW NIGHT.
WE'RE GOING TO CHECK OUT THE BREWERIES OF SOME PEOPLE I KNOW.
WE'RE GOING SAKE TASTING, SO IT'S TECHNICALLY WORK, BUT STILL!
TA DA!
SAKE TOUR
I'M GOING ON A LITTLE GETAWAY WITH SOME FRIENDS!
YEAH.
OH, ONE MORE THING!
..It's just me, the master brewer and Nakagawa-san!!
GLEE
Whoa!
OH, REALLY?
No old man...
HE JUST LEFT WITH A CASK OF SAKE UNDER HIS ARM.
HE'LL BE OUT ALL NIGHT DRINKING WITH OUR NEIGHBOR YAMAMOTO-SAN!
YAY!
GRANDPA WON'T BE HOME EITHER, SO FEEL FREE TO RELAX!

I'll bring you back a souvenir!
I'm off!
WELL, I'D BETTER GET GOING.
JUST LET MY BROTHER KNOW IF YOU NEED ANYTHING.
Wait!
Huh?
THERE'S NO ONE AROUND TO BOTHER YOU.
JUST MAKE YOURSELF AT HOME!
...

OH, SHU-SAKU!
I'M HEADING OUT NOW!
TMP
I GOT IT, I GOT IT.
TAKE CARE OF MUCCHAN, OKAY?
MAKE SURE TO EAT.
And make sure Mucchan eats!
That means...


That means...
The Wakatake Family
Here:
Not here:
See you later!
Off to drink! ☆

YOU AWAKE YET...
...YOU BIG LUSH?
He and I are...
...alone together!

We'll be alone...
...all night!
This could be...
...my big chance!

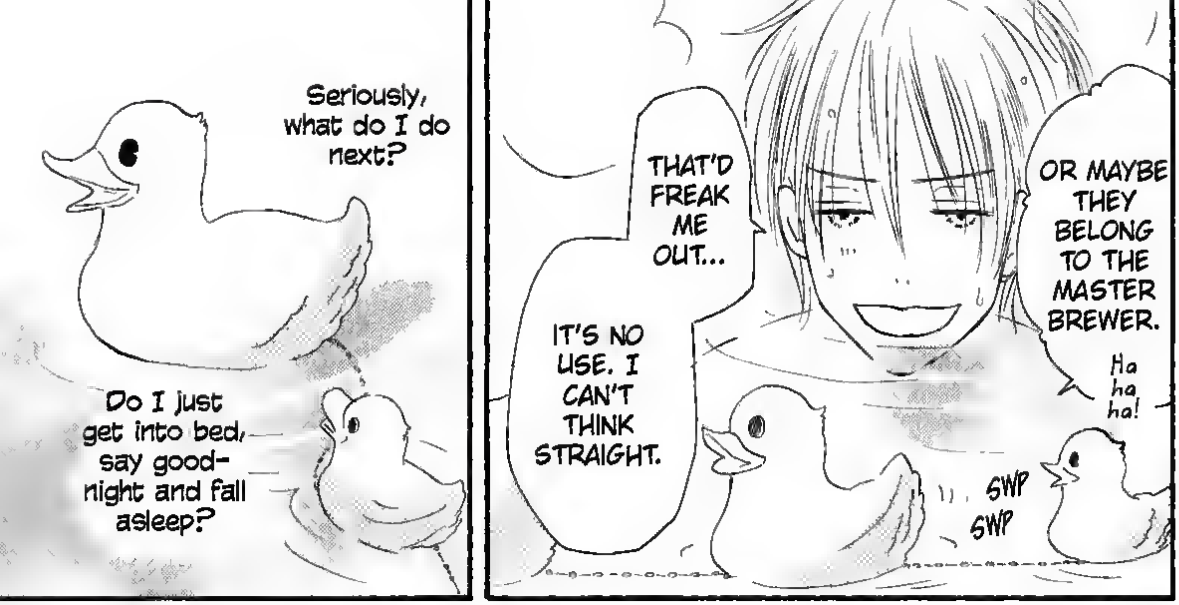
The Scent of Apple Blossoms
Side Story: Part 2

SHIIING
Or so I thought...
BUT IT'S MORE LIKE A BIG HEADACHE.
I CAN'T TAKE MUCH MORE OF THIS GRIM VIBE.
HELP ME, HARUNA-CHAN...
Udon.
WHAT DO WE USUALLY TALK ABOUT?
I can't recall...
WHO'D HAVE THOUGHT I'D EVER BE AT A LOSS FOR WORDS?
Waah...
SLURP SLURP
MUNCH MUNCH
CHING
HEH
I'M FINE. I WAS JUST THINKING ABOUT SOME-THING.
HEH
...HUH.
WELL... YOU WERE LOOKING DOWN AND MAKING THIS WEIRD FACE.
HUH? NO, I'M FEELING FINE! WHY?
HE SPOKE!
HEY, ARE YOU SICK AGAIN?

HUH?
UM...
...IF I'M BOTHERING YOU, I CAN GO.
FIDGET
...
AND AGAIN
SILENCE.
...
HEE
HEE
HEE
...
Sheesh... it's not like me to be this unsure of myself.
I DUNNO, I JUST...
YOU PROBABLY DON'T GET MANY CHANCES TO RELAX ON YOUR OWN...
...SO I THOUGHT I MIGHT BE BOTHERING YOU.
What's wrong with me? If my exes could see me now, they'd laugh their heads off.
YOU KNOW...
...I WISH YOU COULD BE THIS POLITE ALL THE TIME.
!!

ANYWAY, IF YOU GO HOME, I'LL JUST HAVE TO DRIVE YOU.
THAT'D BE A BIGGER PAIN IN THE ASS.
!!
WHAAAT?
A PAIN IN THE ASS?
The ass... ass... ass...
?
A PAIN?
IS THAT ALL I AM TO HIM?
HEY.
WHAT'S WITH YOU?
PAF
YOU'VE BEEN OUT OF IT ALL EVENING.
YOU SURE YOU'RE FEELING BETTER?
THUP
I guess...
...there are times when even my confidence gives out.
HEY.

IT'S NOTHING.
I FEEL FINE, REALLY!
IF YOU SAY SO...
JUST QUIT FREAKING OUT OVER NOTHING...
...AND EAT BEFORE IT GETS COLD.
OKAY.
SPLASH
AND WHAT A BATHTUB IT IS! IT'S ONE OF THOSE OLD JAPANESE CEDAR TUBS.
WHAT ELSE WOULD THEY HAVE AT AN OLD-SCHOOL SAKE BREWERY?
SPLISH
AFTER ACTING LIKE A TIMID VIRGIN ALL EVENING...
...HERE I AM IN HIS BATHTUB!
BUT WHERE DO I GO FROM HERE?
I GUESS THESE ARE HARUNA-CHAN'S RUBBER DUCKS.
They're so cute. I want some!


Seriously, what do I do next?
Do I just get into bed, say good-night and fall asleep?
THAT'D FREAK ME OUT...
IT'S NO USE. I CAN'T THINK STRAIGHT.
OR MAYBE THEY BELONG TO THE MASTER BREWER.
Ha ha ha!
SWP SWP

Being alone in an empty house with the man I love...

...and not doing anything...

WHOOSH
WAAH
I think I may be reaching...
I JUST WANT HIM TO LOVE ME.
SOB SOB
SPLURT
...the end of my rope.
That's not usually my style.
I'M TIRED OF HAVING HIM MAD AT ME.
I WANT HIM TO LOVE ME INSTEAD.
BLUP BLUP
SHOULD I TRY TO MAKE A MOVE?
MAYBE NOT... YEAH, HE'LL PROBABLY GET PISSED.

IS THIS WHAT I'M SUPPOSED TO WEAR? ARE THESE PAJAMAS?
HEY!
HARUNA PUT SOMETHING OUT FOR YOU.
THIS MUST BE IT, THEN.
I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT I'M DOING HERE. OH WELL...
?
I'll just have to improvise.
HUH? NO, NO, I'M FINE!
STEAM
STEAM
I SWEAR!
ACTUALLY, I'M REALLY REFRESHED!
Cedar tubs are great!
WHAT'RE YOU MUTTERING ABOUT?
POP
ARE YOU OKAY?
DON'T TELL ME THE BATH MADE YOU WOOZY AGAIN.
I'm not going in.

I don't even know where to begin...
Why the hell did Haruna give you my yukata?
...
For starters...
WHAT ARE YOU, A CORPSE?
YOU TIED IT ON THE WRONG SIDE.
HUH? WHAT? DOES IT LOOK WEIRD?
FORGET WEIRD! IT'S COMPLETELY WRONG!
WHAT?
AT LEAST FIX THE WAY IT'S TIED.
IT GOES THE OTHER WAY, WITH THE LEFT SIDE ON TOP.
POKE
AWW, REALLY?
BUT THIS IS HOW YOU TIE A BATHROBE!
WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?
Does this look like a BATHROBE?
WELL, I'VE NEVER WORN A YUKATA BEFORE!
IT'S FINE LIKE THIS. JUST THINK OF IT AS A BATHROBE!
That's because it's mine!
It's too big all over...
NO, IT'S NOT FINE. IT BUGS ME.
JEEZ, WHAT AM I GONNA DO WITH YOU? HERE, FACE ME.
GRP
AH!

...
FWP
SIGH
YOU COULD AT LEAST PUT ON SOME UNDERWEAR.
DON'T PRANCE AROUND BUTT-NAKED IN OTHER PEOPLE'S CLOTHES!

Most men don't get turned on seeing another man naked.
THP
...YEAH.
That's right...
SORRY.
I WASN'T THINK-ING...
...
TURN AROUND.
UH...
Why would they?
TUG
IS IT TOO TIGHT?
IT'S FINE.

ALL DONE.
MAKE SURE YOU DRY YOUR HAIR.
PAT
FEEL FREE TO GET A DRINK OUT OF THE FRIDGE IF YOU'RE THIRSTY.
THERE'S GOTTA BE SOMETHING BESIDES SAKE IN THERE.
OKAY.
THANKS.
It's not like I'm conceited or anything...
...but still...

THP
CREAK
I LOVE COLA
I love this stuff!
IT WAS IN THE FRIDGE.
IS IT HARUNA-CHAN'S? Can I have some?
COLA? REALLY? You're so American.
NAH, IT BELONGS TO THE OLD MAN
HIM?
COLA

IS THIS WHAT YOU USUALLY DO?
HUH?
GET OUT OF THE BATH, COOL OFF ON THE VERANDA WITH A GLASS OF SAKE...
MOST OF THE TIME.
NICE. THIS IS REAL JAPANESE LIVING.
I WISH I HAD A VERANDA.
I live in an apartment-
DRINKING SODA POP IN A YUKATA...
WHAT'S WRONG WITH THAT?

NOTH-
ING.
HEY...
DO YOU WANT TO SLEEP WITH ME?
SPLURT
TH--
...
KOFF KOFF
THAT CAME OUT OF NO-WHERE...
KOFF
NO, IT DIDN'T.
I'VE BEEN TRYING TO ASK YOU FOR AGES, BUT YOU PRETEND YOU DON'T NOTICE.
SO I DECIDED TO JUST COME OUT WITH IT.
...

IF...
...THE IDEA OF BEING WITH ANOTHER MAN FREAKS YOU OUT, IF YOU DON'T THINK YOU'LL EVER BE INTO IT...
...THEN I WANT YOU TO TELL ME.
AND THEN I'LL...
FIND ANOTHER GUY?
YOU'RE NOT INTERESTED IN ME IF I WON'T SCREW YOU?
TH...

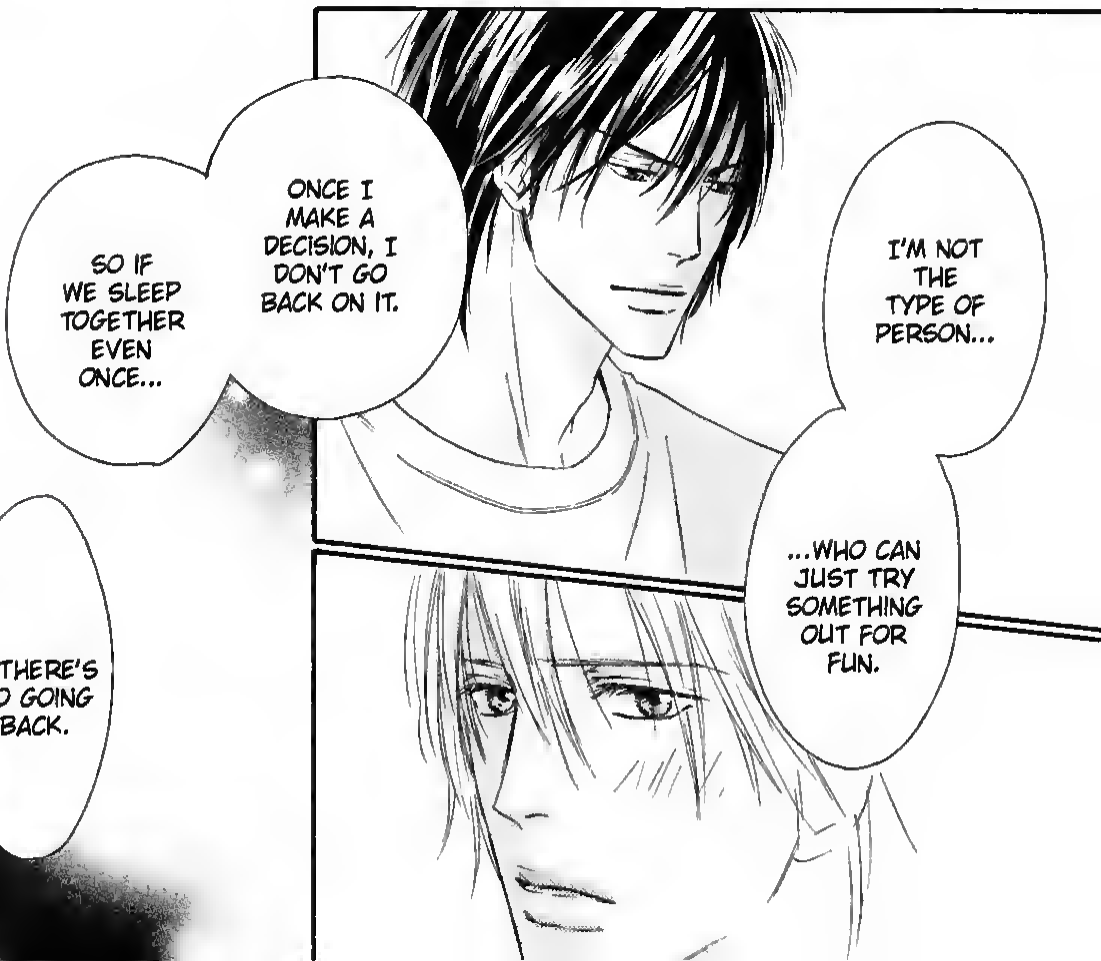
THAT'S NOT WHAT I MEANT!
THIS HAS REALLY BEEN GETTING TO ME!
IS THERE SOMETHING WRONG WITH WANTING TO SLEEP WITH THE PERSON I LOVE?
WHY DO YOU HAVE TO BE SO NEGATIVE ABOUT IT?

SHF
...
SORRY.

TO BE HONEST...
...I'M NOT SURE.
I GET IT. OF COURSE YOU CAN'T BE WITH A GUY...
HEY, DON'T JUMP THE GUN, THERE.
I HAVEN'T SAID ANYTHING YET.
SHF
...
IT'S NOT A QUESTION OF IF I CAN OR CAN'T.
IT'S MORE LIKE...
...I'M NOT SURE IF I SHOULD.
I JUST DON'T KNOW.
WHY NOT?
OF COURSE YOU SHOULD!
I DON'T GET YOU.

I DON'T UNDERSTAND THAT.
KEEPING IN TOUCH WITH YOUR EXES AND STUFF...
YOU'RE SO FREE ABOUT LOVE.
I'D PROBABLY ...
I'M JUST SAYING I'M DIFFERENT.
I'M NOT KNOCKING YOU FOR IT.
MY EXES?
WE'RE JUST FRIENDS, REALLY...
...TIE YOU DOWN.
...DEFI-NITELY...

NO ONE'S EVER SAID THINGS LIKE THAT TO ME BEFORE.
IT'S EMBARRASSING... BUT TOUCHING.
BLUSH
This is...
...getting downright *romantic.*
I DO, BUT...
I MEAN...I'VE NEVER *BEEN* TIED DOWN, SO I DON'T REALLY KNOW...
YOU HATE THAT, RIGHT?
BEING TIED DOWN.


SO IF WE SLEEP TOGETHER EVEN ONCE...
ONCE I MAKE A DECISION, I DON'T GO BACK ON IT.
I'M NOT THE TYPE OF PERSON...
...WHO CAN JUST TRY SOMETHING OUT FOR FUN.
...THERE'S NO GOING BACK.

I'M...
...A PRETTY DIFFICULT PERSON.
YEAH.
I KNOW.
I KNEW THAT AS SOON AS I MET YOU.
BUT I LOVED YOU FOR IT.
...

MAN, NOTHING EVER BRINGS YOU DOWN, DOES IT?
I DID...
...FEEL PRETTY DOWN, BUT STILL...
...I LOVE YOU.
THAT'S NOT TRUE.
I REALLY AM HARD TO LIVE WITH.
YOU MIGHT REGRET THIS.
THAT'S OLD NEWS.

WELL, I MEAN...
ABOUT WHAT?
HEY...
...ARE YOU REALLY SURE ABOUT THIS?
I'M ALL MAN, YOU KNOW...
BRR
BRR
BRR
HOW WOULD I? I'VE NEVER DONE IT WITH A GUY BEFORE.
I...I KNOW, BUT...
IF YOU CHANGE YOUR MIND IN THE HEAT OF THE MOMENT...
...I won't be able to take it!
IS THIS SOME-THING YOU CAN HANDLE?
OH, THAT AGAIN.
BLUNT!
WHAT? REALLY?
I WON'T KNOW UNTIL I TRY.

THUMP
ACK!
GRP
WANNA CALL IT OFF, THEN?
NO WAY!
THEN COME HERE.
GULP
WHY WOULD I BE? WE HAVEN'T DONE ANYTHING YET.
I'm not a teenager.
YOU'RE NOT HARD.

HEY...
I...
...GUESS NOT...
YOU'RE HARD AL-READY!
EVEN THOUGH I HAVEN'T DONE ANY-THING...
AH...
DOES IT TURN YOU OFF?
NOPE.
NOT AT ALL.
MMM...
YES
MM...
OOH...

HFF
...getting worked up all by myself.
NNG ...
OOH...
I must look pretty silly...
HFF
It feels so good...
What now?
AHH...
AH!
There I go again.
OOH...
AHH...
HFF
TRMBL
What do I do?
I have to calm down.
HEY.

MM...
WHAT'RE YOU CRYING ABOUT?
WHAT IS IT?
Your face is a mess.
...
SQUSH
HIC
I...I WAS THINKING ABOUT WHAT I'D DO...
...IF YOU DECIDED TO STOP.
I DON'T THINK I COULD GET OVER IT...
Sob...
SNIFF ...
SOB ...
SERI-OUSLY, YOU NEED...
...TO LEARN TO LIVE IN THE MOMENT.

AH...
GRP
FEEL BETTER NOW?
Y...
YES.
OOH.
OH...
MMM...
OH, YEAH...

...
THAT'S CRAZY ...
WHAT'S GOING ON DOWN THERE?
PIK
KYUU
AHH...
NGH...
AH...
OOOH ...
MMM...
IF...IF YOU LOOK AT IT...
...YOU MIGHT LOSE YOUR HARD-ON...
I'M NOT GONNA GO SOFT.
BUT...
...SHUT UP FOR A SEC.
NGH...
DRIP
YOU JUST...
OKAY?

OH...
NGH...
AH...
AHH
OOOH...
MMM...
CREAK

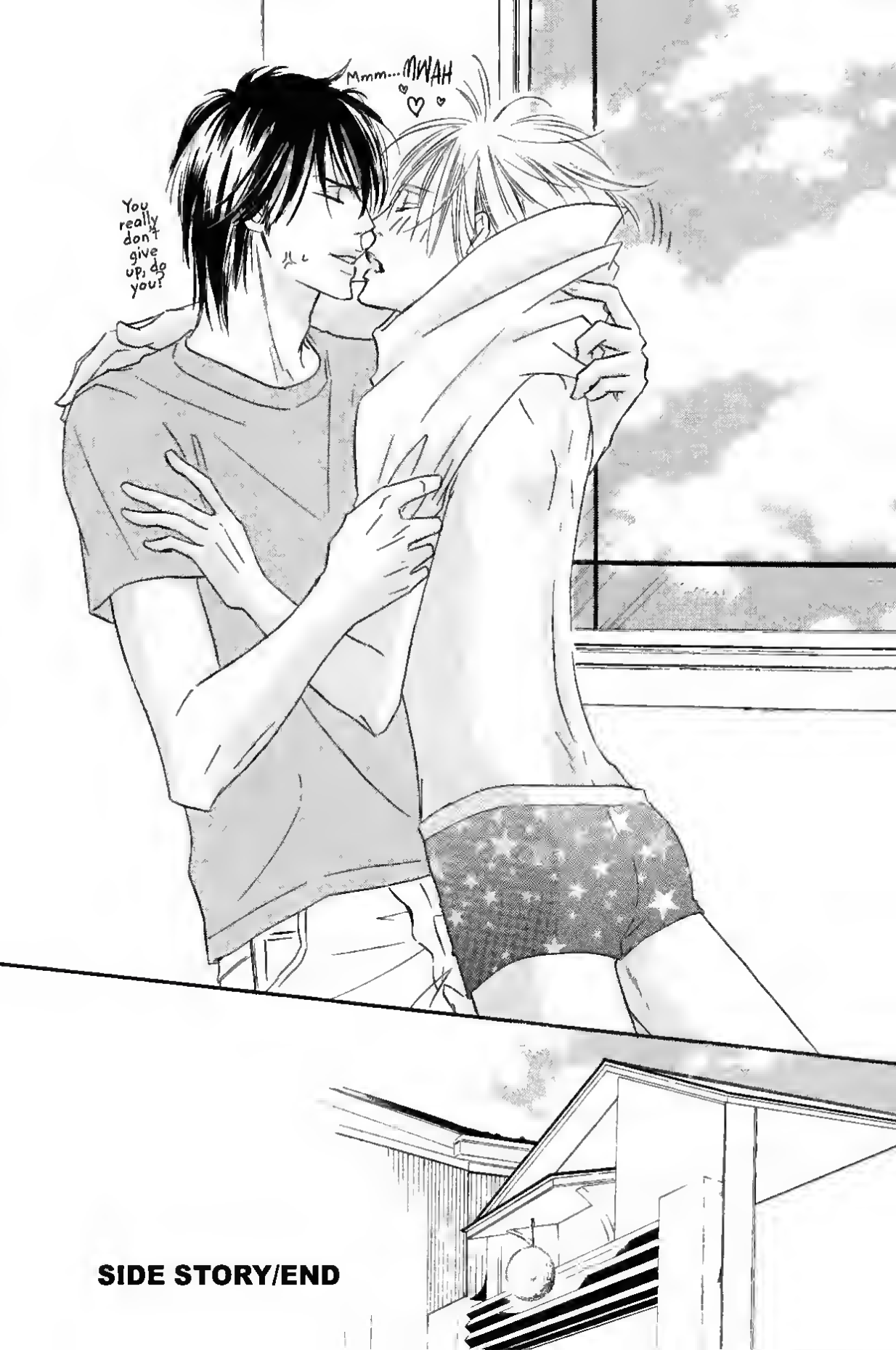
This isn't...
...
...a dream, right?
This is really him!
SHF
RIIING♪
JESS...
...SS...
ACK!
ZZZZ
...
HE'S NOT AWAKE, IS HE?
CHK
WHEW...
RIIING♪
Shh! Shh!
PSST
HELLO?
WHAT?
PSST
WHAT?
He'll wake up!
WHAM
RIIING♪
THAT'S...
...MY CELL PHONE!
RIIING♪
WAIT, WHERE IS IT?
THERE IT IS!
RIIING♪

LOOM
Now? Uh, I'm sort of...
Listen, Jess...
I'm sorry, but I can't do that anymore.
See, I...
PSST
What?! You're in Japan already?!
You can't just spring that on me!
PSST
No, no, there's no way.
PSST
EEK!!
GRAB
END IT.
HUH?!
!!!
...
YEAH... OKAY.
I SAID, END IT.
HUH?
THAT'S NOT WHAT I MEANT.
I WANT YOU TO END IT WITH YOUR EXES. CUT TIES WITH THEM.
I HUNG UP!
Sorry...
You still can't read a mood, can you?
END. IT.
PIP
CLICK

LICK
PIK
MMM...
I'M A DIFFICULT PERSON.
THAT...
...HURTS...
NIBBLE
I TOLD YOU, DIDN'T I?
...might not be so bad...
Being tied down...
Ooh...
MMM...
SO TELL ME...
...DO YOU LIKE MY BODY?
MM...
HA HA...
AH!
FLOP

SHF
SHF
I DUNNO.
NOT BAD...
...I GUESS.
JUST SAY I'M GOOD!
COME ON!
HEH ...
THU
AND DO YOU MAYBE ...
...LIKE ME TOO?
MP
I FORGOT ABOUT HIM.
HEY, PUT SOME CLOTHES ON!
CLOTHES! CLOTHES! WHERE ARE MY CLOTHES?
HOW SHOULD I KNOW?
SIR! GRAMPS!
WHAM
Did he fall over?
What was that?
RUMBLE
THUMP THUMP
WHOO!
CHAKKA
SLAM
HEY, EVERYONE, I'M HOME!
CHAK

Arrgh!
ALL I HAVE IS THE YUKATA!
And it's a mess!
THERE HAVE TO BE SOME CLOTHES OF MINE AROUND HERE.
JUST THROW SOME-THING ON!
GRAMPS WON'T COME INTO MY ROOM.
GRAB SOME CLOTHES.
OOH...
God, his back is so hot!!!
HEART CLENCHING
THUD
BANG
Ahhh.
Keep it down!
Oww! You don't have to hit me!!
WHAM
AT LEAST THEY SEEM TO BE GETTING ALONG...
WHAT'RE THEY DOING AT THIS HOUR?
Too much sake...
Blech
SQUOOSH
HEY ...
WHAT'RE YOU DOING?
JUST GET DRESSED!
You're such a pain!!
COME ON!
Let's go for seconds!



SIDE STORY/END

Hello, Toko Kawai here.

Thank you so much for choosing this manga! How did you enjoy this incredibly frustrating romance? Man, those two know how to drag it out, don't they?

I wanted to write about a *tsundere seme* who was always cold. But then I realized that if he never ran hot, the story wouldn't go anywhere! I'm so glad they finally got together!

Because this story is set in the world of sake, I got to combine work with pleasure and go out drinking for research, asking the employees all about sake. I really learned a lot! I even took notes... Except that I would get drunk, and then the next day, when I looked at my notes, I'd just have a list of mysterious words (sometimes they weren't even actual letters). I'd think, "What the heck is this?" That happened a lot. Drinking is fine, but I need to remember not to overdo it...

Anyway, here's a little extra chapter I wrote for this volume. I really upped the romance here (comparatively speaking).

I hope we meet again!

Tsundere: A character who acts cool and aloof but is secretly warm-hearted.

Seme: The dominant partner in a boys' love relationship.

The Scent of Apple Blossoms
Afterwards
BEEP BEEP
NGN ...
THE ALARM'S GOING OFF...
BEEP BEEP
BEEP BEEP
AM 6 0
OOF...
AREN'T YOU GETTING UP?
FLOP
NAKAGAWA-SAN!
DON'T YOU HAVE TO GET UP EARLY TO MAKE A LONG-DISTANCE DELIVERY TODAY?
YAWN
THIS IS THE SECOND TIME THE ALARM'S GONE OFF. IS THAT OKAY?
NO... ...
FIVE MORE MINUTES...
Ha ha...
I GUESS YOU'RE NOT A MORNING PERSON, HUH?
WAKE UP, SHUSAKU...
...
SHU-KUN... ♡
QUIT IT!

GRP
OUR GOOD-MORNING KISS! ♡
NO THANKS!
SQUOOSH
AWW...
ERK
MMM... ♡
WHAT'RE YOU DOING?
DOING?
His back!
DO YOU WANT BREAK-FAST?
I'M GONNA TAKE A SHOWER.
HEY, I STUCK AROUND, DIDN'T I?
YOU MEAN JUST WHAM, BAM, THANK YOU SIR? THAT'S SO COLD!
I SHOULD'VE GONE HOME LAST NIGHT. THE BREWERY'S SO FAR FROM YOUR PLACE.
DAMMIT, I'M WIPED OUT...
Stingy!
AHH...
WHAT A BEAUTIFUL MORNING.
NAH, I DON'T HAVE TIME!
Jeez...

WELL, I'M HEADING OUT.
AT LEAST HAVE SOME COFFEE. I POURED YOU A CUP.
Yeah? OH, THANKS.
~♪
Mm, that's good.
MUNCH
SHOOF
AND HERE.
I MADE YOU A SANDWICH TO EAT ON THE ROAD.
Take the coffee too.
SHOOF

I'm a surprisingly good cook!
WHAT'S THAT? YOU'RE TOUCHED THAT I MADE YOU A MEAL?
THEN WHERE'S MY THANK-YOU KISS? ♡
...
YOU MADE THIS?
I JUST SLAPPED IT TOGETHER. SANDWICHES ARE EASY.
I got some good ham!
HMM... THANKS.
BYPASSED.
THANKS FOR THE LUNCH.
I'D BETTER GET GOING.
OH, HEY, WHAT ABOUT TONIGHT? ARE YOU COMING OVER?
NO FAIR!
Today is Saturday, so we've got tomorrow off.
OH!
HEY!
YOU FORGOT SOME-THING!
LATER.
HUH?
Why are we having this conver-sation?
IF YOU COME OVER, I'LL MAKE BREAKFAST!
DON'T MAKE ANY PLANS. I DON'T KNOW HOW THINGS ARE GOING TO GO.
HM ...
I DUNNO. IT DEPENDS ON WORK.

A man who never gives up.
WHERE'S MY GOOD-BYE KIIIISS?
...
WHAT'S WITH YOU TODAY?
WHAT? NO GOOD-BYE KISS EITHER?
WHAT KIND OF KISS WILL YOU GIVE ME?
NONE OF THE ABOVE!
YOU'RE SO MEAN...
THEN... WHERE WILL YOU KISS ME?
I'M NOT GONNA PLAY THIS GAME!
YOU'RE CRUEL ...
NO WONDER YOU DON'T GET ALONG WITH PEOPLE! YOU DON'T KNOW HOW TO COMPROMISE!
WHAT?
It's true!
IF WE'RE DATING, IT'S IMPORTANT TO HAVE SOME GIVE-AND-TAKE!
I gave up on several crucial kisses!
...

OKAY...
YAHOO!
...
Wow.
LICK
GRP
Maybe I can get him to do this every time...
MMM...
This is one passionate kiss.
Now that's what I call a good morning! ♡

Hmm?
He just keeps going...
HE...
HFF...
Wait, this is getting ...
SQUELCH
...really ...
...hot and heavy!!!
MMM...
MM...
Ooh...
Not there...
MMM...
MMMPH...
When he uses his tongue like that...
...it makes me weak at the knees...
NGH...

LICK
BRRR
AHH...
AH...
HFF
Ah...
NGH...
OH, SHU...
I KNOW!
YOU SURE DON'T!
THAT'S SO MEAN...
HOW CAN YOU KISS LIKE THAT FIRST THING IN THE MORNING ...
...WHEN YOU'RE HEADING OUT THE DOOR?
THAT'S WHY I DIDN'T WANT TO KISS YOU!
I HATE MUSHY STUFF. I DON'T WANNA DO THINGS HALF-ASSED, YOU KNOW?

SHU...
...DO YOU HAVE A LITTLE MORE TIME?
OF COURSE NOT. I'M LATE ENOUGH AS IT IS.
THP
YEAH, BUT... JUST A LITTLE MORE...
DAMMIT.
DON'T COMPLAIN IF I GO TOO ROUGH ON YOU.
Heh heh...
SO YOU SAY...
...BUT YOU'RE ALWAYS GENTLE. I WON'T BREAK, YOU KNOW.
...

THEN HARUNA CAN GET PISSED AT *YOU* TOO.
SHE'S REALLY SCARY...
OKAY!
HA HA! BUT ENOUGH ABOUT HARUNA-CHAN...
OOH, *MMM*... HEY.... ♡
CHIRP
CHIRP

Who do you think made that delivery? I had to close the shop and do it myself! Grandpa wasn't in!
And Mucchan, what about you? You ran into him and invited him to breakfast? You may have the day off today, but we don't! You know that, don't you? I realize you're sociolly inept, but this is another story! And Shusaku, you...are you listening to me?
Speaking of which, you've been staying out all night a lot lately! You're an adult and all, but learn some moderation!
...
SHE'S REALLY SCARY...
RAGE
RAGE
S-sorry...
She was really pissed.
AFTERWARDS/END